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**The Church of Pius XII after World War II
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edited by

Claus Arnold, Valentina Ciciliot, Giovanni Vian

Editorial

Claus Arnold, Valentina Ciciliot, Giovanni Vian
the Editors-in-Chief

The research on Pius XII has been flourishing for some time – among several studies, we would like to mention the important book written by Giovanni Miccoli, *I dilemmi e i silenzi di Pio XII. Vaticano, Seconda guerra mondiale e Shoah* (new updated edition, Milan: BUR, 2007, the first edition is dated to 2000) and, as an extensive biographical profile of Eugenio Pacelli, Philippe Chenaux's volume, *Pie XII. Diplomate et Pasteur* (Paris: Cerf, 2003) – and is receiving a further significant impulse from the opening of the archival collections relating to Pacelli's pontificate in the various Archives of the Vatican in March 2020. The almost simultaneous outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has impeded but not prevented the development of new, articulate research and contributions, resumed in very recent times.

The present *JoMaCC* special issue is devoted to “The Church of Pius XII after World War II (1945-58). The *relationes ad limina* as Sources for Historiographical Reflection”. First of all, as far as the period of interest is concerned, the choice was that of going beyond the most investigated phase of the Pacellian pontificate, that of World War II. This period has always attracted the attention of public opinion, as well as of historians, in order to understand the Holy See's attitude in the face of World War II and the Shoah, its relations with European fascist totalitarian regimes in the last phase of their existence, as well as with the Soviet Union and more generally communism. Despite the attention on the dense, complex, dramatic period covering the first six years of Pius XII's pontificate, from 1939 to 1945, from

a chronological point of view, it was the post-war period which was the scene of about two-thirds of the entire Pacellian papacy: a trivial, but nevertheless important observation. Certainly, the post-war period was inevitably deeply conditioned by the choices made in the previous phase of the pontificate. Nevertheless the Holy See and more generally the Roman Catholic Church were placed in a new scenario, in which the world order was being rearticulated at the level of international relations and political balances, of socio-economic developments, of cultural expressions, of religious experiences.

Secondly, the *relationes ad limina*, viz. the reports written by the bishops for their periodic visits to the Roman Curia, constitute the golden red thread that runs through all the contributions in this second JoMaCC issue, insofar as they constitute the main, if not the only exclusive base of documentation used by the authors. This is an archival source based on an ancient custom, which has seen interesting developments over the centuries.¹ The regulation concerning the *relationes ad limina* in the twentieth century was shaped by the important changes made under Pius X, who, as part of the reform of the Roman Curia carried out in 1908 with the apostolic constitution *Sapienti consilio*, transferred the competencies in question to the Consistorial Congregation. With the decree *De relationibus dioecesanis et visitatione sacrorum liminum* of 31 December 1909,² this new dicastery issued a wide-ranging and detailed questionnaire called *Ordo servandus in relatione de statu ecclesiarum* (with 150 questions),³ extending the obligation of *ad limina* visits to all the diocesan ordinaries and fixing the timeframe at the level of five years. Following the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which reserved canons 340-342 to the *ad limina* visits, the Consistorial Congregation under Benedict XV published a new questionnaire with 100 questions on 4 November 1918,⁴ followed on 16 April 1922, at the beginning of the pontificate of Pius XI, by similar provisions of the Propaganda Fide for the missions, with a form with 90 questions to which was attached a compendium of information on the situation of the missions.⁵ These two texts were still in force for the episcopal preparation of the *relationes ad limina* during the pontificate of Pius XII.

With regard to this specific type of texts, we would like to highlight a few specific elements that are present, also implicitly, in the

¹ Cf. the contribution of Enrico Galavotti in this issue.

² Cf. AAS (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*), 2 (1910), 13-16.

³ In AAS, 2 (1910), 17-34.

⁴ Cf. "De relationibus dioecesanis", in AAS, 10 (1918), 487-503.

⁵ Cf. "Epistola ad episcopos, vicarios, praefectosque apostolicos ac missionum superiores: de relationibus missionum, singulis quinquenniis exhibendis", in AAS, 14 (1922), 287-307.

different articles of this special issue. First, the use of this type of documentation lends itself to serial investigation from a diachronic point of view, and to a comparative investigation from a spatial and thematic point of view. In this way the authors of this issue have understood it in general terms, although each one has then offered specific insights of the historical situation and the geographical contexts on which they worked.

As serial historical source documents, the *relationes* are predisposed to form the basis for a comparison of the similarities and differences that the various local, regional, and macro-regional situations present. If their interpretation is not pushed too much, the documents in question can open up a stimulating perspective on the church of Pius XII because they offer surveys capable of showing not only the point of view of the top, constituted by the Holy See who dictated topics through fixed questions, but also that of the hierarchy below the top. Their reports were certainly not an immediate expression of the 'base' of the churches, but this base was at least indirectly present in the more or less meticulous diocesan reports handed in by the bishops.

Although the questionnaires predispose to a comparative use of information, they also convey, at least in part, a standardisation and seriality that can sometimes lead to reductive views, which is not quite functional for the representation of particular local conditions. For instance, the questionnaire invites the bishops to provide the information on the general condition of the diocese only in their first report. This can be explained by the desire to shorten the reports but reveals also a somewhat static view of historical phenomena which are presumed to remain stable over the short/medium term.⁶ However, the final question in both the 1918 and 1922 questionnaires⁷ asks for a summary judgment about the state of his diocese, and thus offers the bishops a personal space of reflection that leads to a possible insight into further local aspects and problems.

Moreover, we must consider that the *relationes ad limina apostolorum* are reports to the Holy See on the state of the ecclesiastical circumscription entrusted to episcopal care and are potentially conditioned by a defensive psychological attitude that tends to push bishops to mitigate problematic aspects or to trace their causes to phenomena and subjects outside its jurisdiction and even the church. If this is true in general, it should be verified on a case-by-case ba-

⁶ Cf. respectively S. Congregatio Consistorialis, "De relationibus dioecesanis", in AAS, 10 (1918), 487, pars III; e S. Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, "Epistola ad episcopos, vicarios", AAS, 14 (1922), 288, "Animadvertenda", no. IV.

⁷ Cf. respectively S. Congregatio Consistorialis, "De relationibus dioecesanis", in AAS, 10 (1918), 502-3, no. 100; e S. Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, "Epistola ad episcopos, vicarios", AAS, 14 (1922), 301-2, no. 90.

sis, through comparison with other sources, such as, for example, the reports of apostolic visitors or the acts of pastoral visits, but also sources external to the ecclesiastical institution, such as reports of state organisations, insofar they provide information on the activity of religious communities or the religious behaviour of the local population. In this special issue, however, the articles privilege the source of the *relationes ad limina*: when read together, these source documents open up a first broad look, even geographically speaking, at the various local Catholicism(s) in the immediate post-World War II period and, albeit to a lesser extent, of their relationship with the Holy See and its Roman conception of Catholicism.

This issue consists of eight contributions aiming at covering a vast geographical area – from the United States to ex-Yugoslavia, passing through Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, and the Scandinavian peninsula – between 1945 and 1958.

Although local specifics emerge, which are dictated by very different geographic and historical conditions such as the greater or lesser impact of World War II on the material conditions or the consequent establishment of governments of opposite ideological orientations in the different analysed countries – we are at the dawn of the Cold War –, it is possible to trace common focal points and problems, which are somehow typical of the church(es) under Pacelli: the threat of indifferentism or materialism, anti-Protestantism, the attention on Catholic education, the defence of family life (against mixed marriages, contraception, abortion, divorce, etc.).

Above all the concept of indifferentism stands out as the enemy of Catholicism: in Spain bishops began to speak of a religious indifferentism “which had nothing to do with the anticlerical hostility of the years of the civil war and took on different aspects depending on the diocese”, being named as materialism, de-Christianisation, atheism, rationalism, sensualism, religious indifference, secularism; in the United States the expression “material humanism” becomes a container in which to place nearly all the “errors and dangers” that the bishops feared: atheism, agnosticism, secularism, communism, Protestantism; even in the ‘highly civilised’ and ‘advanced’ Scandinavia “religious indifferentism has horribly grown”. According to the bishops, the causes of this materialism and secularism were due to different factors, but the major culprits were socialism and communism on one side (see the Italian case in particular) and secularist laws, non-denominational schools, and Protestant influence on the other side. Also, the war was mentioned as an important factor. Cleverly enough, the German bishops spoke about a ‘double’ materialist threat: that of ‘practical’ materialism in West Germany (initially provoked by “the state of extreme necessity, which left practically no room for consideration of the religious sphere, and which could be accompanied by an accentuated search for sensible pleas-

ures in a context of great deprivation" and eventually by an abundance of available goods which was also able to affect family morality), and that of dialectical materialism in the GDR (from Marxism, promoted and spread by the political authority). This second materialism is also the object of fears and of complaints by the Yugoslavian bishops, namely as the *materialismus theoreticus* supported by the Communist government that also fosters other 'evils' such as divorce and abortion.

The defence of family life, threatened by secularised societies, is strictly linked to this topic. The majority of the *relationes ad limina* reveals how the local episcopates in this post-war period are greatly anxious about the preservation of the Catholic family and the respect for morality within married life. The sacred character of marriage is perceived as endangered by neo-Malthusianism, 'onanism' (contraception), abortion, euthanasia, etc. These biopolitical issues would become more and more relevant in the 1960s, but concerns about the disintegration of the traditional family find their origins already in this context. Particularly in non-Catholic countries such as the United States, Germany and Scandinavia, Protestantism is identified as a major factor of this degeneration.

An important tool for reconquering society for Catholicism is seen in Catholic education, in schools. In Spain, following the reform measures of primary and secondary education issued between the end of the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, schools assume a confessional character with the bishops' applause; both French and Belgium bishops attach great importance to Catholic education (independent schools in France, *écoles libres*, where many ecclesiastical vocations are awakened; in Belgium also to public schools, where priests or trained lay people teach the catechism and sacred history); the US bishops perceive schools as an indispensable battleground and constantly report the establishment of new parochial schools, which never seem to be sufficient in number, and almost all of them stress their strategic importance.

The elements outlined here are, of course, not the only possible interpretative reading of the documentation presented in this special issue and common traits should not simplistically obscure relevant specificities. Just to mention a couple of them, the French *relationes ad limina* of the period allow us to reconstruct an innovative ecclesial landscape that was labelled as *progressismus gallicus* (indicating here not only the action of the French worker priests, but also a set of innovative pastoral proposals and new approaches) perceived with fear and concern by the Vatican, but also with hope by other local episcopates.

The very complex situation in ex-Yugoslavia speaks also about repression: "when it comes to talking about the clergy, the religious, the tones, especially in 1946-48, resemble those of real war bulle-

tins: we find lists of priests arrested or killed". In an anti-religious state such as the communist one, the question of survival became central, and the documentation shows both Catholic resistance and attempts of détente.

Finally, a particular study concerns the usefulness of the German *relationes ad limina* from the perspective of the history of Catholic ecumenism. Omissions and silences on important embryonic ecumenical activities within well-known German dioceses can be traced back mainly to a problem of 'literary genre', that is, "to the main purpose of the *relationes*, which rather than providing a complete snapshot of the state and activity of the diocese had to focus on statistical data, on figures regarding access to the sacraments, and thus justify the lower frequency of the Easter precept by referring to the spread of indifference and materialist ideology among the faithful".

Although the *relationes ad limina* can be a limited and problematic source, in this special issue the contributors tried to enhance their potential, highlighting what they are able to say about the local situations but also within the more general relations with the Catholic Church as a whole. A comparative reading of all the articles of the issue helps us to know more about the pontificate of Pius XII, but also about the local churches of his time.

Religious Reconquest, Social Commitment and Marks of Secularisation in *relationes ad limina* of some Spanish Bishops (1947-57)

Enrico Baruzzo

Independent scholar

Abstract The essay examines the *relationes ad limina* written by some Spanish bishops between 1947 and 1957. In these documents the bishops deal with the pastoral action carried out to restore Catholicism to Spain after the years of the Second Republic and the civil war and they describe the intense social commitment promoted since the end of the 1940s to combat illiteracy and misery of workers and peasants. They also report behaviours and data that highlight a growing secularisation and contrast with the image of a compact Catholic Spain.

Keywords Relationes ad limina. Spanish Church. Francoist regime. Religious reconquest. Social Catholicism. Secularisation.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Religious Reconquest in the *relationes* of 1947. – 3 Social Commitment in the *relationes* of the 1950s. – 4 Indifferentism and Detachment from Catholic Morality.



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1 Introduction

In the long and complex question of Francoist Spain, the years between 1945 and 1957 are known as the period of ‘Catholic hegemony’.¹ At the end of the Second World War, the necessity to get out of international confinement produced by the defeat of German National Socialism and Italian Fascism induced Franco to promote a ‘Catholic’ image of the regime, placing members of Catholic Action in top political positions (the most famous example was the designation as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Alberto Martín-Artajo, president of Spanish Catholic Action, in July 1945) and supporting the National Catholic intentions of building an *intégriste*, antimodern society, based on the binomial Catholicity-Hispanity.² In those years the involvement of the Church in the life of the regime was strong, higher than that there was in the 1960s with the rise to power of so-called ‘technocrats’ of Opus Dei. This involvement reached its peak in August 1953 with the signing of the Concordat with the Holy See, an event that, with the agreements signed with the United States in the previous month, marked the end of Spain’s international confinement and opened the way for the subsequent admission in the international body of United Nations system.

In the light of these synthetic considerations, some interest might rise by proposing an analysis of the *relationes ad limina* presented to Consistorial Congregation in 1947, 1952 and 1957 by the bishops of Barcelona, Burgos, Calahorra y La Calzada, Ciudad Real, Málaga, Seville and Solsona. These documents are characterised by the rigidity of a model of *relatio* developed in 1918. Despite this, the *relationes* offer many information like accounts of the material and moral conditions of dioceses or the difficulties with which the bishops and their clergy had to measure themselves. From a particular point of view, the *relationes* give information on the transition from the period of reconstruction following the civil war to the period of the social commitment of the Spanish Church, characterised by orientations that considered the policies of the regime with growing perplexity. These are sources that, beyond their specificity,³ provide data and information that describe a more complex and many-sided socio-religious framework than the image of a compact Catholic Spain publicly promoted by Francoist authorities and ecclesiastical

1 Cf. Di Febo, Juliá, *Il franchismo*, 36-68.

2 About the trend of “collaborazionist Catholicism” and the relationship between Francoist State and Catholic Church in this period: cf. Tusell, *Franco y los católicos*. On National Catholicism in Spain: cf. Botti, *Nazionalcattolicesimo e Spagna Nuova*.

3 On the specificity of *relationes ad limina* as historical source: cf. Cárcel Ortí, *Introducción general*; Menozzi, “L'utilizzazione delle *relationes ad limina*”.

hierarchy; most of all, they testify to the presence of growing and diversified social apostolate that will constitute the fertile ground in which the ferments destined to explode with the Second Vatican Council were inserted.

The sample taken into consideration is small – the *relationes* examined were 20 on a total of 153 presented by the Spanish bishops to the Holy See between 1947 and 1957, corresponding to 13% of the total – but it can be considered significant. The *relationes* examined concern, in fact, dioceses of different dimensions⁴ and different geographical positions.⁵ Therefore the *relationes* examined can offer a sufficiently ample overview to offer elements suitable for the deepening of the passage of the Spanish Church from the triumphant period of National Catholicism, which reaches its peak in the International Eucharistic Congress in Barcelona (1952), to the self-criticism which, in the 1960s, will lead the detachment from the Franco regime.

2 The Religious Reconquest in the *relationes* of 1947

The *relationes* of 1947 relate to the commitment developed, between 1942 and 1946, in continuing the recovery of the damage caused by the civil war, which ended in 1939. The bishops informed the Holy See of the efforts made to rebuild or restore hundreds of churches and ecclesiastical structures devastated during the conflict⁶ and to reinstate diocesan administrations severely affected by the destruction of the archives.⁷ They informed about the commitment to increase

⁴ According to the data of 1947, two dioceses (Barcelona and Seville) were chosen with over one million inhabitants, three dioceses (Burgos, Ciudad Real, Malaga) with a population between 500,000 and 1 million inhabitants and two dioceses (Calahorra y La Calzada, Solsona) with less than 250,000 inhabitants.

⁵ Two dioceses are located in northern Spain (Burgos and Calahorra y La Calzada), two in Catalonia (Barcelona and Solsona), one in the central region of Castile-La Mancha (Ciudad Real) and two in southern and extensive Andalusia (Malaga and Seville).

⁶ In Seville, according to what Cardinal Pedro Segura y Sáenz reported, more than 190 churches had been rebuilt in the five years from 1942 to 1947 (Seville 1947, 10, no. 21), while from Barcelona Bishop Gregorio Modrego Casás informed that all the churches of the diocese had been destroyed or heavily damaged during the civil war, but the reconstruction and restoration works were completed when he was writing the *relatio* (Barcelona 1947, 26, no. 21).

⁷ The bishop of Ciudad Real, Mons. Emetterrio Echeverría Barrena, announced the reconstruction of the destroyed diocesan archive was in development (Ciudad Real 1947, 6, no. 13). From Malaga, the apostolic administrator, the bishop of Granada, Balbino Santos Olivera, informed that, even if the loss of the oldest documentation was complained, the Curia archive, which were set on fire in 1931 and then again in 1936, had been brought back into use, and that the parish archives, after “the very recent devastation of the Marxists”, had resumed their conservative function but contained only documents dating back to 1937 (Malaga 1947, 14, nos. 14-15).

the number of diocesan clergy, greatly reduced by the drop in vocations caused by years of anti-religious struggle and by the killings of priests suffered during the civil war⁸ and therefore unable to guarantee the priestly presence in many parishes, as happened in the dioceses of Burgos and Calahorra y La Calzada where 500 and 132 parishes respectively had no priest.⁹

In particular, in the *relaciones* the bishops accounted for the efforts made to realise the “religious reconquest” of Spain¹⁰ through a traditional pastoral strategy, based on catechistic teaching,¹¹ on popular missions,¹² on spiritual exercises promoted for age groups, and on public manifestations of devotion to the Eucharist and to the figure of Virgin Mary.¹³ In this work of reconquest, the bishops assigned a central role to Catholic Action, called to promote religious education and access to the sacraments,¹⁴ to defend the value of Christian marriage against the practices of onanism and neo-Malthusianism,¹⁵ to support the Catholic expectations of moralisation of the Spanish society through pressure on civil authorities to control clothing and behaviour in public places¹⁶ and requests for greater control of state censorship to avoid the propagation of subjects deemed indecorous in the press.¹⁷

An important tool for reconquering Spain to Catholicism was represented by the school, which, following the reform measures of pri-

⁸ The bishop of Ciudad Real, for example, reported that 104 priests had died during the war (Ciudad Real 1947, 9, no. 29).

⁹ Burgos 1947, 14, no. 64; Calahorra y La Calzada 1947, 19, no. 64.

¹⁰ Cf. Callahan, *La Iglesia católica en España*, 360-5.

¹¹ All the *relaciones* relate that catechistic teaching was carried out regularly on Sundays and holidays for children and young people and that special catecheses were given in the preparation to the sacraments of communion and confirmation. Catechistic teaching of adults seems to be more problematic: in Seville it was neglected by the parish priests “vanis prae-textibus” (with vain pretexts) (Seville 1947, 49, no. 72), while in Malaga it was cared for by few parish priests (Malaga 1947, 48, no. 74), and in Ciudad Real the bishop noted that the parish clergy did not work for the catechism for adults with the same fervour as they did for the younger age groups (Ciudad Real 1947, 17, no. 74).

¹² The following *relaciones* report on missions among people carried out on a parish scale during the Lent period: Barcelona 1947, 64, no. 75; Burgos 1947, 17, no. 75; Solsona 1947, 11, no. 75. In Seville, in 1946, all parishes had given missions among people: Seville 1947, 29, no. 73. In Calahorra the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary were entrusted to organise the missions according to a turnover that provided for their carrying out in all parishes every ten years (Calahorra y La Calzada 1947, 20-1, no. 75). The translations from Latin into English are edited by the Author.

¹³ In Barcelona, in addition to spiritual exercises carried out in a cloistered regime, the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was carried out in May 1943 and a diocesan Eucharistic congress was organised in 1944 (Barcelona 1947, 92, no. 100).

¹⁴ Seville 1947, 32, no. 83.

¹⁵ Burgos 1947, 19, no. 87.

¹⁶ Barcelona 1947, 92-3, no. 100.

¹⁷ Malaga 1947, 62, no. 96.

mary and secondary education issued between the end of the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s (*Ley de Reforma de la Enseñanza Media*, 1938, and *Ley sobre Educación Primaria*, 1945), had assumed a confessional character. “Omnes scholae et publicae et privatae sunt confessionales” (all public and private schools are denominational), wrote the bishop of Calahorra and the apostolic administrator of Malaga:¹⁸ in all the *relationes* the bishops marked the teaching of Catholic religion at school and the carrying out of weekly inspections by parish priests. In a more or less articulated way, they informed the Holy See of the *victoria católica* on the education front.¹⁹ About this the *relationes* of 1947 omitted limits and problems starting from the fact that rural areas, poorly supported by public authorities and particularly subjected to school dropout, were sparsely considered by religious orders who preferred to open their institutes in large urban centres and aim at medium-high social classes.²⁰

Concessions on scholastic front were just some of the forms of support that the Francoist State granted to the Church and to the Catholic religion, indicated as the state religion in the by *Fuero de los Españoles*, the charter that had established formally the rights and duties of all the Spanish people (July 1945). They were intertwined with the economic support to the Church through the provision of funds for the reconstruction of sacred buildings and allowances for the maintenance of the clergy. To these privileges were added the prohibitions of proselytism for non-Catholics, the measures for festive rest, the acknowledgement of the civil effects for religious marriage, the exercise of a censorship that had crushed the spiritism and theosophism, for the bishops widely publicised during the Second Republic. The bishops rendered an account of these aspects in their *relationes* and they affirmed that, in the new political context, the enemies of the faith represented by Liberalism, Socialism and Freemasonry were absent or, in any case, forced into a condition of marginalisation and clandestinity.²¹

¹⁸ Calahorra y La Calzada 1947, 24, no. 91; Malaga 1947, 59, no. 91.

¹⁹ Cf. Canales Serrano, “El bachillerato en los años 40”.

²⁰ Cf. Callahan, *La Iglesia católica en España*, 352-3. An aspect that comes out, but is not developed, was the disincentive to opening private Catholic schools, since all public schools were denominational. In the *relatio* of 1947, the bishop of Solsona wrote that “non dantur scholae confessionales propriae, quia scholae publicae sunt confessionales” (no confessional school of their own are given because the public schools are denominational) (Solsona 1947, 13, no. 91).

²¹ “Si quid massonismi post leges latas adhuc est, in umbris operatur. [...] Id dicendum de socialismo” (If there is something Masonic after the promulgated laws, it operates in the shadows. [...] The same is true of socialism) (Ciudad Real 1947, 22, nos. 97-98). “Massonicae sectae hodie in Hispania iuridice prohibitaе sunt, nec possunt infaustam activitatem suam palam exercere. Plurima tamen mala secreto machinantur, quae difficile admodum vitari queunt, adversus Ecclesiam et Statum civilem” (Masonic sects

In the *relationes*, the recognition of a favourable condition towards the Church did not necessarily correspond to an appreciation of the political situation in Spain, even if expressions such as “greatest Duce” and “happy outcome of the civil war” betray the appreciation for the regime by bishops such as Gregorio Modrego Casaus, diocesan ordinary of Barcelona, and Luciano Pérez Platero, archbishop of Burgos, figures closely bound to Francoism.²² Because of the particular purpose of the documents, the bishops do not expose themselves in flat judgments, even when they are of well-known anti-Francoist positions, as in the case of Fidel García Martínez, bishop of Calahorra y La Calzada.²³ The only exception is constituted by Cardinal Pedro Segura y Sáenz, archbishop of Seville: in his opinion, the main error against the faith in Spain was represented by Falangism, considered guilty of making confusion among the believers through the attempt to establish a natural religion.²⁴ It was, however, a judgment based not on political reasons but on a Catholic integralism, which

today in Spain are forbidden by law, and they can't openly carry out their injurious activity. However, many evils are secretly plotted, which can hardly be avoided, against the Church and the civil state) (Malaga 1947, 62, no. 97).

22 Examples in: Barcelona 1947, 17, no. 4; Burgos 1947, 6, no. 17. Gregorio Modrego Casaus (1890-1972) was a close collaborator of Isidro Gomá y Tomás, bishop of Tarazona and later archbishop of Toledo, cardinal and primate of Spain. Modrego was consecrated bishop in 1933 and was coadjutor of Cardinal Gomá. In 1937 he was appointed military pro-vicar general and, on the death of Gomá, he was designated apostolic administrator of the archdiocese of Toledo. At the end of December 1942, he was appointed bishop of the diocese of Barcelona, where he entered in March 1943. In Barcelona he was involved in the reconstruction of the churches destroyed during the civil war, he promoted numerous charitable works and an intense pastoral activity in the suburbs area. For a biographical profile, cf. Cárcel Ortí, “Modrego Casás, Gregorio”. Luciano Pérez Platero (1882-1963), after having held various positions in the Curia and in the Seminary of the diocese of Calahorra, was bishop of Segovia (1929-44) and archbishop of Burgos (1945-63). A radical conservative and an opponent of the Second Republic, he supported the military revolt and collaborated with the Franco regime. He was a member of the Cortes Españolas. He was a convinced promoter of Catholic Action and promoted the birth and spread of the Hermanas Misioneras de Acción Parroquial, a religious congregation aimed at supporting the pastoral action carried out in parishes. For a biographical profile, cf. Brocos Fernández, “Pérez Platero, Luciano”.

23 Bishop of Calahorra y La Calzada since 1927, Fidel García Martínez, during the Second World War, was very critical of the Franco regime's support for National Socialism and, in 1947, he was one of the four Spanish bishops who did not vote in the referendum on the *Ley de Sucesión en la Jefatura del Estado*, which gave Franco the right to choose his successor. Harshly opposed by the Falange, he was forced to renounce the episcopate in May 1953. Cf. San Felipe Adán, “García Martínez, Fidel”.

24 “Praeter socialismum et communismum, qui hodie propter persecutionem legalem non audent se exhibere, praecipuus error qui contra fidem in hac dioecesi, sicut in omni Hispania serpit, est ‘Nacional Sindicalismo’ Falangismo, ut ajunt, qui pro viribus satagit confusionem in principiis Religionis inter fideles seminare, atque quamdam speciem novae religionis naturalis imponere” (In addition to socialism and communism, which today don't dare show themselves because of legal persecution, the main error against the faith in this diocese, as it spreads among all Spain, is the ‘National Sindacalism’ Falangism, as they say, which strives to create confusion in the principles of Religion

was suspicious towards the State, that drove Segura to clash several times with Franco and the regime authorities.²⁵

Despite the intense evangelising action developed in the 1940s and the support of a State that declared itself confessional, the bishops were forced to transmit data not particularly flattering regarding attending Mass and the fulfilment of the Easter precept, important indicators of religious affiliation. From the *relaciones* of 1947 it emerges that in Burgos only 60% of the population fulfilled the festive and Easter duties,²⁶ in Barcelona 62% celebrated Easter²⁷ and in Ciudad Real “many forget the sacred precept”.²⁸ In Malaga only 5% of men and 15-20% of women attended Mass and received sacraments during the Easter period, while in Seville, where the precept of the festive mass was “too neglected”, only 30% fulfilled Easter duty.²⁹ The situation was better in the smaller dioceses, where, however, there were significant differences related to the size or social context of each parish. In Solsona the Easter precept was satisfied by all the believers in the rural parishes but in the mining areas the percentage of fulfilment collapsed to 30% among men and 60% among women.³⁰ In Calahorra, 80% of the men living in the territories of the smaller parishes fulfilled Easter duty, a percentage that dropped to 50% in the major parishes, where the control capacity of the clergy and of the social system was lower.³¹ The statistics testified a contradiction between the optimistic narrative of a Catholic Spain, supported by the massive public demonstrations of faith, and the reality, where, despite the efforts made, religious adherence found difficul-

and to impose a kind of new religion) (Seville 1947, 9, no. 15). Identical considerations are present in: Seville 1952, 10, no. 16.

25 Pedro Segura y Sáenz (1880-1957) was bishop of Apollonia and Coria, archbishop of Burgos, Toledo and Seville and cardinal of Santa Maria in Trastevere. He was a strong supporter of the monarchy and of King Alfonso XIII, who recommended the appointment of Segura for the see of Burgos and Toledo. Segura was openly hostile to the republican regime that arose after the elections of 1931 and the departure from Spain of Alfonso XIII; for this reason, in September 1931, he was forced to renounce the office of archbishop of Toledo and moved to Rome. In September 1935 he was appointed archbishop of Seville by Pius XI. He frequently clashed with the Franco regime due to the suppression of Catholic social organisations and condemned Spain's alliance with the totalitarian regimes of Germany and Italy. He was also very critical of the agreements signed between Spain and the United States. In the post-concordatory context, Segura was flanked in the leadership of the diocese of Seville by the Coadjutor Archbishop Bueno Monreal and his figure was progressively isolated. About Cardinal Segura, cf. Gil Delgado, *Pedro Segura*; Cárcel Ortí, “Segura y Sáenz, Pedro”.

26 Burgos 1947, 19, no. 86.

27 Barcelona 1947, 72, no. 86.

28 Ciudad Real 1947, 20, no. 86.

29 Malaga 1947, 56-7, no. 86; Seville 1947, 32-3, no. 83.

30 Solsona 1947, 12, no. 86.

31 Calahorra y La Calzada 1947, 23, no. 86.

ties to take root, especially among the poorest and more disadvantaged social classes, represented by the workers circles, still considered connected to the communist ideology, and by the farm workers who worked in the large landed estates of Andalusia.

As we have seen, in order to face these obstacles, the *relaciones* give account of traditional pastoral strategies. The only one which moves away from this line is the *relatio* of Mons. Vicente Enrique y Tarancón, bishop of Solsona, who, in the final judgments on the diocese, speaks about the need for a social apostolate among workers aimed at combining religious and moral formation with a commitment to social promotion, which, however, was forced to compete with the prohibition of trade union association imposed by the regime.³² Belonging to the ranks of bishops supported by Martín-Artajo, who wanted an episcopate attentive to social renewal,³³ Tarancón realised the need for a change of strategy to respond to the needs of specific social classes and create the potential premises for their re-evangelisation, identifying a path which would be firmly embraced by the Spanish Church in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

3 Social Commitment in the *relaciones* of the 1950s

Between the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s, the Spanish Catholic reality initiated, even if not in a homogeneous way, a social discourse. In 1946, at the request of Pius XII, the *Hermandades obreras de acción católica* (HOAC) and the *Juventud obrera católica* (JOC) were launched under the aegis of Catholic Action with the aim of re-evangelising workers' reality considered by the Spanish bishops still affected by social-

³² Solsona 1947, 14-15, no. 100.

³³ Cf. Tusell, *Franco y los católicos*, 139. Vicente Enrique y Tarancón (1907-1994) was a leading figure in the history of the Spanish Church in the second half of the twentieth century. Ordained priest in 1929, during the 1930s he undertook to reorganise Spanish Catholic Action, collaborating with the Casa del Consiliario established by Ángel Herrera Oria. From 1945 to 1964 he was bishop of Solsona, where he stood out for his organisational dynamism and care for the formation of the clergy. In 1964 he was transferred to Oviedo, where his pastoral government was characterised by a marked participatory tone. In 1969 he was assigned to the diocese of Toledo and in the same year he was appointed cardinal. In December 1971 he was appointed archbishop of Madrid-Alcalá, a diocese which he held until 1982. Between 1972 and 1981 he was president of the Spanish Bishops' Conference: in this office, he committed himself to make the Spanish Church independent from political power and promoting its renewal according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. He had a decisive role in the process of peaceful transition from the Franco regime to the democratic system. For an outline of Tarancón, cf. Cárcel Ortí "Enrique y Tarancón, Vicente". See also: Infesta, *Tarancón: el cardenal de la reconciliación*; Bort Castelló, *Vicent Enrique i Tarancón*. About pastoral action of Tarancón in Solsona: Berettini, "Tarancón. Obispo de Solsona".

ism and communism.³⁴ In 1949 the Social Weeks of Spanish Catholics, suspended during the years of the civil war and the world conflict, resumed. In 1951, in a period of heavy economic crisis, the metropolitans published an instruction dedicated to justice and charity, which reminded the public authorities of the duty to intervene to mitigate the conditions of poverty caused by famine.³⁵ These were the first phases of a path that was consolidated in the 1950s and which saw the Spanish episcopate increasingly convinced of the necessity of an improvement of social conditions to ensure a religious future for the Church.³⁶

This social attention was reflected in the *relationes* transmitted to Rome in 1952. In them, bishops informed of the launching of the HOAC and the JOC in their dioceses and of the opening of evening schools for workers.³⁷ To this were added the reports of initiatives with the purpose to promote a solid Catholic social conscience. From Barcelona, where the preparations and the celebration of the International Eucharistic Congress of 1952 had incited the beginning and the strengthening of social initiatives, Bishop Gregorio Modrego announced the opening of the Instituto católico de Estudios Sociales aimed “to train men who know the social doctrine of Church and offer adequate solutions to the social problems that are arising”, and the existence of Orientación Católica profesional del dependiente, an institution aimed at discerning professional attitudes, protecting the rights of workers and forming a Catholic-social conscience in them.³⁸ From Malaga, Bishop Ángel Herrera Oria, a figure with an important political past and founder in 1951 of the Leo XIII Social Institute in Madrid for the labour apostolate, informed that every Sunday he gave homilies, broadcasted by radio, dedicated to justice and charity.³⁹

³⁴ On the circumstances that led to the HOAC birth: cf. López García, *Aproximación a la historia de la HOAC*, 27-35.

³⁵ Cf. “Deberes de justicia y caridad”.

³⁶ Cf. Callahan, *La Iglesia católica en España*, 324-9.

³⁷ The following *relationes* report the HOAC and JOC existence: Burgos 1952, 12, no. 94; Solsona 1952, 17, no. 100. It is reported the presence of evening school for workers in: Barcelona 1952, 74, no. 91; Ciudad Real 1952, 17, no. 94.

³⁸ Barcelona 1952, 80-1, no. 94.

³⁹ Malaga 1953, 19, no. 27. Ángel Herrera Oria (1886-1968) was one of the founders of the Asociación Católica Nacional de Propagandistas (ACNP) and editor of the Catholic newspaper *El Debate* from 1911 to 1933. Supporter of the political unity of Spanish Catholics, in 1931 he founded Acción Popular, a confessional party that the following year changed the name to Acción Nacional and in 1933 joined the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA). Designated president of Spanish Catholic Action in 1933, he left the charge in 1936 to move to Friborg, where he conducted his theology studies. Returning to Spain in 1943 after his priestly ordination, he saw his political influence increase starting in 1945, with the ascent at important roles in the regime by personalities connected to the ACNP. In 1947 he was appointed bishop of Malaga, a diocese that he held until 1966. For a biographical profile: cf. Orella Martínez, “Herrera Oria, Ángel”.

In the final judgments they wrote at the end of the *relaciones*, some bishops paid attention to the social problems that afflicted the populations of their dioceses and that threatened to have an impact on religious life. Tarancón spoke of inflation and the housing crisis that worried the workers, distracting them from caring for spiritual things.⁴⁰ Mons. Echeverría Barrena, bishop of Ciudad Real, wished for greater social justice,⁴¹ a question faced in a more articulated way by Herrera who denounced the presence of a capitalist socio-economic system that forced the workers into misery.⁴² On these topics, however, the final judgment written by Mons. García Martínez remains silent, although the bishop of Calahorra had offered the HOACs, between 1950 and 1951, a set of original observations that focused on the lack of growth of the Spanish economy rather than on the unbalanced distribution of wealth, an aspect on which the part of the Iberian episcopate most attentive to social issues was concentrating.⁴³

The judgments were expressive of the persuasion that there was a profound connection between religious detachment and unresolved social and economic problems, which produced misery and inequality, as asserted by Tarancón in the pastoral letter *El pan nuestro de cada día*, published in 1950, in which he denounced the social injustice present in Spain. For this Tarancón was accused of being a “red” and “communist” bishop.⁴⁴ However, this vision did not translate into alternative proposals with respect to regime policies.⁴⁵ In their 1951 instruction, the metropolitans had shown themselves to be sympathetic to the National Catholic vision, attacking liberalism which they considered contrary to the common good and natural law.⁴⁶ Despite the fact that they felt the burden of not being able to organise Catholic workers’ associations, the bishops continued to be opposed to the trade union freedom required by the HOACs, because they feared it could open the way⁴⁷ for communism and, publicly, they invited the believers to collaborate with the trade union system regime.⁴⁸ On the other hand, as emerges from the *relaciones*

⁴⁰ Solsona 1952, 17, no. 100.

⁴¹ Ciudad Real 1952, 18, no. 100.

⁴² Málaga 1953, 48-9, no. 100.

⁴³ Cf. Arizmendi, de Blas Zabaleta, *Conspiración contra el obispo*, 212-17.

⁴⁴ Cf. Enrique y Tarancón, *El pan nuestro de cada día*.

⁴⁵ Cf. Callahan, *La Iglesia católica en España*, 317-18.

⁴⁶ Cf. “Deberes de justicia y caridad”, 261.

⁴⁷ Cf. Tusell, *Franco y los católicos*, 212.

⁴⁸ Still in 1955, speaking at the 15th Social Week of Spanish Catholics, Tarancón declared that the worker had “the duty to actively and loyally participate in the trade union” and to respect the laws of the State that established trade union unity (Rodríguez Martín, “La crítica del obispo Pildain”, 127).

themselves, several bishops, like the Catholics who had roles of responsibility in the regime, were persuaded, between the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s, that the trade union organisations promoted by the Francoist authorities were in agreement with the Social Teaching of the Church.⁴⁹

Pastoral attention to social problems was maintained throughout the 1950s, as attested by the *relationes* of 1957. In them the problems of the outskirts and the housing shortage emerge: these issues were faced by coordination structures such as the Secretariat of the suburbs of Barcelona, opened in 1956 with the aim of implementing concrete proposals on the social, cultural and religious level in the suburbs of the city,⁵⁰ and through the construction of houses for the working class families, as it happened in Seville.⁵¹ Most of all, the commitment of dioceses in Education and in professional training is consolidated, as testified by the presence of after-school programs managed by Catholic Action in Burgos⁵² and professional workshops in Malaga.⁵³

This last theme appears to be of fundamental importance in the pastoral action of Mons. Herrera and Mons. José María Bueno Monreal, dynamic coadjutor with right of succession to Cardinal Segura in Seville.⁵⁴ The first, with the financial support of Francoist authorities, promoted the construction of 250 schools-chapels aimed to combat illiteracy and religious ignorance in the district of Malaga.⁵⁵ The second, according to what he wrote in the detailed *relatio*

⁴⁹ The *relationes* of Ciudad Real (Ciudad Real 1947, 21, no. 94) and of Malaga, which indicated the regime trade unions constituted “with a Christian spirit and under priestly counsel” (Malaga 1953, 16, no. 94), expressed themselves in this sense.

⁵⁰ Barcelona 1957, 101, no. 100.

⁵¹ Seville 1957, 48, no. 100. In the *relatio*, the coadjutor archbishop informed that 1,000 houses for the workers had been built by the Catholic Action and that the construction of another 1,500 houses was planned. Also in Barcelona, between 1952 and 1956, 1,600 homes were built for families belonging to the lower and middle social classes with funds raised by the institute Viviendas del Congreso Eucarístico Internacional (Barcelona 1957, 102, no. 100).

⁵² Burgos 1957, 17, no. 91.

⁵³ Malaga 1958, 16-17, nos. 94-95.

⁵⁴ José María Bueno Monreal (1904-1987) was appointed coadjutor archbishop of Segura in Seville in October 1954, after having been bishop of Jaca and Vitoria. In April 1957, after the death of Cardinal Segura, he became the titular archbishop of the diocese and in December 1958 he was created a cardinal by John XXIII. He participated in the Second Vatican Council and, in the wake of conciliar teaching, provided for the enhancement of the laity in apostolic activities, integrated men and women religious into diocesan life, and renewed the spiritual life of the diocese. For a profile: cf. Cárcel Ortí, “Bueno Monreal, José María”.

⁵⁵ Cf. Sánchez Jiménez, *El cardenal Herrera Oria*, 73-8. Herrera offers only a mention of this commitment in the *relationes*, claiming to be totally dedicated to the construction of state and parochial schools (Malaga 1953, 50, no. 100).

brought to Rome in 1957, considered cultural and professional promotion a decisive element in preventing the return of violence against the Church: in his opinion, anarchist and communist ideas had, in fact, been able to spread and produce a brutal detachment from the Church because of inequalities and ignorance present in the Andalusian countryside. For this reason, in an area where he estimated that 50% of children did not go to school, he expressed the intention, concretised through parish schools, to contrast illiteracy and cultural degradation of the peasant masses.⁵⁶

Through the list and description of charitable and educational activities, the *relationes* testified, therefore, the transition from charity to social justice, characterised by the ambiguity of a State-Church relationship suspended between support and criticism.⁵⁷ Meant to re-evangelise, the social commitment they described had, however, to clash with dynamics that indicated detachment from the Church and its teachings and discussed the public image of a compactly Catholic Spain.

4 Indifferentism and Detachment from Catholic Morality

The progressive social commitment of which the bishops informed in their *relationes* in the 1950s did not bring great advances on the pastoral level, as the trend of religious life indicated. The majority, in some cases almost all, of the people living in the territories of the dioceses were baptised, married in church and, when dying, received the sacraments.⁵⁸ However, the data transmitted to the Holy See on attendance at Sunday Mass and on the fulfilment of the Easter precept indicated that the levels of participation in ecclesial life had remained those of the second half of the 1940s, with a trend to decline rather than growth. Compared to the 1947 data in Barcelona and Seville, the number of pascalizers was falling: in Barcelona they went from 62% in 1947 to 58% in 1957 and in Seville from 30% to 20%.⁵⁹ The fulfilment of the Easter precept was growing in Burgos (it passed from 40% in 1947 to 95%-100%, depending on the parish, in 1957), where, however, the number of participants in Sunday Mass

⁵⁶ Seville 1957, 47, no. 100.

⁵⁷ On the theme: cf. Montero, *La Iglesia*, 52-8 especially.

⁵⁸ The only exception was represented by the suburbs of Barcelona: according to the *relatio* of 1952, 36% of the people residing there died without sacraments, a datum that increased in the following years, reaching 40% of the faithful belonging to the working class living in the suburbs (Barcelona 1952, 71, no. 86; Barcelona 1957, 81-2, no. 86).

⁵⁹ Furthermore, about hearing Sunday Mass, Bueno Monreal reported that "respect is very lacking" and that weekly Communion was received by a variable percentage between 1-2% (Seville 1957, 42-3, no. 86).

was decreasing (from 60% in 1947 they had fallen to 38% in 1957), and in Malaga (male pascalizers increased from 5% to 40% and female ones from 20% to 70%), where, yet, Herrera had to report that “the negligence of the people towards the sacred precept of listening to the mass is still deplorable”.⁶⁰

This stalemate in religious life, which testified to the presence of parts of the population substantially impervious to the intense action of re-evangelisation implemented since the end of the civil war, intertwined with phenomena that denoted a detachment from the Church and its teaching. In *relationes* the bishops began to speak of religious indifferentism, which had nothing in common with the anticlerical hostility of the years of the civil war and took on different aspects depending on the diocese. For Herrera, bishop of Malaga, it was associated with peasant environments where cultural and religious ignorance was widespread.⁶¹ For Mons. Modrego, bishop of Barcelona, it was, instead, an urban phenomenon, not connected to theoretical reflections but, rather, to ways of life that did not ask themselves the religious problem,⁶² a judgment shared by Mons. Pérez Platero, bishop of Burgos, who considered the indifferent people present in his diocese “not enemies of the Church, but rather lazy and indolent”.⁶³

To indifferentism, the bishops added the observation of social and private behaviours that did not agree with the Church’s teaching. In *relationes* the bishops spoke of greed for money, lack of attention to the poor and hedonism present in the wealthiest and most consumerist segments of the population.⁶⁴ They asserted that the sacral character of marriage was endangered by neo-Malthusianism, onanism and voluntary abortion.⁶⁵ Driven by government measures taken to accredit the confessional image of Spain sanctioned by the Concordat, bishops found that, following the closure of the brothels, clan-

⁶⁰ Malaga 1958, 15, no. 86.

⁶¹ Malaga 1953, 49, no. 100.

⁶² Barcelona 1952, 66, no. 84; Barcelona 1957, 76, no. 84.

⁶³ Burgos 1957, 19, no. 100. The Seville *relatio* of 1957 speaks of people “who do not care at all about religion, although all, in articulo mortis, [...] receive the sacraments” (Seville 1957, 10, no. 16).

⁶⁴ After having affirmed that the people of Malaga were of a Christian spirit, Bishop Herrera, in the *relatio* of 1952, was forced to admit that the most common behaviours were marked by frivolity, greed and lust. In addition to social injustice, he stated that greed was present, an aspect which he confirmed in the judgment of the *relatio* of 1957 (Malaga 1953, 41, no. 74 and 49, no. 100; Malaga 1958, 17, no. 100). Mons. Modrego stated that economic prosperity in the diocese of Barcelona had induced many well-off people to arrogant conduct, devoid of a spirit of charity (Barcelona 1952, 67, no. 84; Barcelona 1957, 76-7, no. 84).

⁶⁵ Burgos 1952, 12, no. 87; Burgos 1957, 16, no. 84; Calahorra y La Calzada 1957, 14, no. 87; Solsona 1952, 14, no. 87; Solsona 1957, 14, no. 87. Herrera speaks about “voluntary abortion” in: Malaga 1953, 44, no. 87; Malaga 1958, 16, no. 87.

destine prostitution was spreading and began to report the presence of the homosexual phenomenon, brutally repressed by the Francoist authorities who considered it in contrast with the national Catholic vision of the strong-willed and dominant Spanish male.⁶⁶

The noting of orientations and behaviours dissonant with ecclesiastical directives did not push the bishops to reflect on the pastoral strategy put forward. The *relationes* inform that the diocesan ordinaries remained convinced of the validity of the “total religiosity”, based on Eucharistic congresses, on popular missions, on the *peregrinationes* of the image of Our Lady of Fatima.⁶⁷ The obstacles to a Christian way of life were ascribable to the inauspicious influence of the Republican period and the civil war and to the influence coming from outside through cinema, books and tourism, a phenomenon that broke out between the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s. Foreign films, books smuggled in from abroad or taking advantage of the loose meshes of censorship, contacts with tourists were considered guilty by the bishops of spreading ideas and styles of behaviour that perverted the religious spirit and corrupted the Christian morality of young people and women, whom the ecclesiastical and National Catholic vision wanted docile and submissive to men.⁶⁸ Problems and dangers came from the outside, not from the interior of a country considered Christian.

The *relationes* by Echeverría Barrena and Tarancón seem to partially escape this vision. In the *relatio* transmitted to Rome in 1952, the bishop of Ciudad Real affirmed that the devotion manifested in the great celebrations did not correspond to the true Christian spirit and that many believers practised “by inertness and family custom”.⁶⁹ In the *relatio* of 1952, Tarancón, on the other hand, spoke of the existence of a “divorce” between religious life and the believers’ behaviour.⁷⁰

Precisely the observation of this divergency induced, in the following years, the bishop of Solsona to start a process of rethinking the

⁶⁶ Bishop Modrego noticed that the prohibition of prostitution imposed by the government was applied in “a different way according to the nature of the magistrates and the places” and was evaded especially in large centres (Barcelona 1957, 78, no. 84). In addition to prostitution, Bishop Bueno Monreal mentioned the existence of the “vice of male homosexuality, especially in the countryside” (Seville 1957, 41, no. 84). On the ideological basis of the repression of homosexuality during Francoism: cf. Ugarte Pérez, “Las bases ideológicas de la represión”.

⁶⁷ Cf. Orensanz, *Religiosidad popular española*, 9-22.

⁶⁸ Complain about the “evil example of foreign people” and the influence of cinema: Barcelona 1957, 103, no. 100; Burgos 1957, 20, no. 100. The following *relationes* speak of the clandestine press with contents defined as “obscene” and “evil”: Calahorra y La Calzada 1957, 15, no. 96; Seville 1957, 45, no. 96. Herrera complains about public sale of books written by authors of “bad doctrine” in: Malaga 1958, 17, no. 96.

⁶⁹ Ciudad Real 1952, 15, no. 84.

⁷⁰ Solsona 1952, 16, no. 100.

comforting public image of Catholic Spain. In the mid-1950s, in two pastoral letters then republished in the volume *Examen de conciencia* or “autocrítica”, he reflected on the problems and limits of Spanish Catholicism identified in a faith connected to ritual but without ethical implications, in the poor quality of the formation of the clergy, in the uniformity of pastoral life unable to see the real needs of the believers.⁷¹

In the second half of the 1950s, Tarancón was, in a prudent manner, an authoritative voice of that portion of Spanish Catholicism that, with the help of the tools offered by French religious sociology, was initiating an ample self-criticism of Spanish Catholicism, ranging from ideological and doctrinal to ecclesial and pastoral dimension.⁷² However, he represented a minority: most of the bishops continued to consider Spain totally Christianised and looked with suspicion at the news from France and Germany.⁷³ This was testified by some *relations* of 1957, where it is possible to notice the echoes of ferments that were beginning to run through Spanish Catholicism, causing in the bishops a sense of annoyance. From Barcelona Mons. Modrego reported that a worker priest had left the diocese and that some priests, “guided by false zeal”, had shown themselves to be inclined towards what he called “progressism gallicanum”, identifiable in the theological and pastoral innovation of French derivation.⁷⁴ Mons. Bueno Monreal, on the other hand, reported with concern the existence in Catholic intellectual circles of a “liberal sense” that refused to protect the rights of the Church on the educational and economic front, guaranteed by the condition of a confessional State.⁷⁵

In the *relations* of the 1950s, therefore, limits and contradictions emerge: there is a Spanish Church characterised, on the one hand, by the theoretical and practical activism of social Catholicism and, on the other, by the general lack of will to rethink a pastoral action comforted from the support of the civil powers but in difficulty in transmitting a message of faith that would be able to be incisive for the conscience of people. In the *relations*, behind the rigidity of the form and the prudence of the tones, it is possible to discern the problematic nature of the turning point of the 1950s that leads from the triumphalism of the ‘first Francoism’ to the phase of the *España del desarrollo*, in which the message of the Second Vatican Council will act.

⁷¹ Cf. Enrique y Tarancón, *Examen de conciencia*. The book re-proposed two pastoral letters – “La renovación total de la vida cristiana” and “¿Espiritualidad nueva?” – addressed by Tarancón to his own diocesan clergy between 1955 and 1956.

⁷² Cf. Montero, *La Iglesia*, 37-98; Carmona Fernández, “Autocrítica del catolicismo español”.

⁷³ Cf. Callahan, *La Iglesia católica en España*, 379-87.

⁷⁴ Barcelona 1957, 25, no. 16 e 61, no. 52.

⁷⁵ Seville 1957, 46, no. 99.

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The *relationes ad limina* of the German Bishops From Post-War Emergency to Confronting the ‘Double’ Materialist Threat (1948-58)

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Abstract The paper analyses the content of the *relationes ad limina* drawn up by German bishops between 1948 and 1958. In their abundance of information, these documents make it possible, among other things, to shed light on the episcopate's view of the material and moral condition of the German Catholic population in the immediate post-war period and in the 1950s, as well as on the situation of the Catholic Church in the two German states (FRG and GDR) separated by the ‘Iron Curtain’. In the last years of Pius XII's pontificate, a cause of great concern for the ecclesiastical hierarchy was on the one hand ‘practical’ materialism in a West Germany that was experiencing a phase of rapid economic growth, and on the other dialectical materialism in an East Germany under Soviet influence.

Keywords Catholic Church in Germany. German Episcopate. *Relationes ad limina*. Cold War. Materialism.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 An Awkward Post-War Period: The *relationes* of 1948. – 3 The 1950s and the ‘Double’ Materialist Threat. – 4 Concluding Remarks.



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1 Introduction

The *relationes ad limina* written by the German bishops between the epilogue of the Second World War and the end of Pius XII's pontificate total 56: 18 date to 1948, 19 to 1953 and the same number to 1958.¹ At that time, there were 22 Catholic dioceses on German territory:² for more than half of them, all three *relationes* are available (e.g., for the important dioceses of Cologne, Münster and Trier), while for others, two (Berlin, Eichstätt, Freiburg, Munich, Paderborn, Speyer) or only one (Meißen, Würzburg) are preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Archive. The reason for such gaps is generally to be found in the succession between two bishops that occurred not too distant from the time when the *relatio* was to be presented: in this case the new Ordinary was allowed to refrain from producing the document.³

Taken as a whole, the *relationes* not only provide a great deal of specific information on the various dioceses, but also make it possible to clearly grasp an evolution that took place within the space of just a few years: that of a Germany which, after the historical caesura of 1945 and the post-war emergency, experienced an era of rapid economic growth and the consequent spread of new kinds of social behaviour in its western part, while the eastern one became a building ground for the Socialist state. In this respect, the *relationes* of the German bishops can be divided into two distinct groups: on the one hand, those of 1948, which offer a picture of the difficulties that the defeated population – and with it also the ecclesiastical authority – had to face in the years immediately following the fall of the National Socialist regime; on the other hand, the documents of the 1950s, which mostly refer to a country, West Germany, that was undergoing profound socio-economic and cultural transformations – the Marshall Plan ended in 1951 – but which sometimes also allow us to investigate the condition of the Catholic Church in East Germany.

1 According to the instructions of the decree *A remotissima* (1909), which came into force in 1911, the German bishops had to present the *relatio ad limina* in the third year of each quinquennium (cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [AAS], 2 (1910), 13-16: 14): this explains the deadlines of 1948 (8th quinquennium), 1953 (9th quinquennium) and 1958 (10th quinquennium). The new questionnaire issued by the Consistorial Congregation in November 1918 (cf. AAS, 10 (1918), 487-503) had not been accompanied by a modification of this *modus procedendi*. It is interesting to notice, moreover, that some *relationes* from 1958 (Augsburg, Eichstätt, Freiburg and Speyer) bear a date subsequent to the death of Pius XII (9 October 1958).

2 Neither the Erzbischöfliches Amt Görlitz constituted in 1946, which formally fell within the archdiocese of Wrocław, nor the diocese of Essen erected in 1958, are included in this number.

3 Thus the decree *A remotissima*: “Si annus exhibendae relationi adsignatus, ex toto vel ex parte, inciderit in primum biennium ab initio dioecesis regimine, fas erit Ordinario ab exhibenda relatione, et a visitatione sacrorum Liminum peragenda pro ea vice, abstinere” (AAS, 2 (1910), 13-16: 15).

The structure of this paper is based specifically on this subdivision.

At the end of the war, Germany was a territory militarily occupied by the four victorious powers (USA, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union).⁴ In the summer of 1945, then, the Potsdam Conference decided that the German regions east of the Oder-Neisse line were to be annexed to Poland and the USSR. The situation of a large portion of the population was desperate, especially in the big cities: civilians had to face a shortage of food and clothing, as well as heating material; there was a lack of sufficient living space due to the destruction provoked by the bombings; diseases such as tuberculosis and typhus were widespread; many industrial plants were seriously damaged or at a standstill, resulting in mass unemployment. Further complicating this scenario was the migration of over twelve million ethnic German refugees – almost half of whom were Catholics – from the former *Reich* territories and other parts of Eastern Europe: this mass of *Heimatvertriebene* (Expellees), deprived of everything, flooded primarily within the borders of the dioceses of East-Central Germany (Paderborn, Hildesheim, Osnabrück, Fulda, Meißen).⁵ Personally interested in the vicissitudes of the German people, Pius XII was able to send them material aid from the Vatican only from 1946 onwards.⁶

In spite of the political upheavals and drastic changes in the country, the Holy See opted not to modify its diocesan structure, not even after the formal division between West Germany (FRG) and East Germany (GDR) in 1949. On the other hand, Pope Pacelli did not carry out any new ecclesiastical reorganisation of the regions acquired by Poland as a result of the conflict: this had to wait until the early 1970s.⁷ In the context of the incipient Cold War, thus, the territory of five German dioceses (Fulda, Osnabrück, Paderborn, Würzburg, and to a lesser extent Hildesheim) ended up being directly crossed by the 'Iron Curtain'. But the contraposition between the two blocs obviously also affected the diocese of Berlin, by virtue of West Berlin being an enclave in the GDR. The fact that it extended over two countries on completely divergent paths, however, did not prevent the German Catholic Church from continuing to consider itself as one and having an episcopal conference (the Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz) in which all Ordinaries participated.

After the cessation of hostilities, the Holy See endeavoured to obtain detailed information about the actual state of the Church in Germany and the religious and moral situation in the various dioceses.

⁴ Cf. Hürten, "Beobachtungen zur Situation".

⁵ On Catholic Church and *Heimatvertriebene* in post-war Germany see Bendel, *Aufbruch aus dem Glauben?*; Voßkamp, *Katholische Kirche und Vertriebene*.

⁶ Cf. Leiber, "Pius XII.", 114; Wollasch, *Humanitäre Auslandshilfe*, 55-7.

⁷ Cf. Hallier, "La Santa Sede e la questione tedesca", 14-15.

In addition to re-establishing stable contacts with the German episcopate, Pius XII therefore decided to send three Vatican missions to the country between the late spring and autumn of 1945. The last of these initiatives led to the creation of a permanent structure in Kronberg im Taunus (near Frankfurt), headed by the German-American Bishop Aloisius Muench (1889-1962) from the summer of 1946.⁸ Only a few months after his transfer in Germany, Muench carried out an apostolic visitation on behalf of the Holy See in the American, French and British occupation zones. From this experience originated a general report which was delivered to Pius XII in the winter of 1947,⁹ and which could draw on accounts prepared in the German dioceses in anticipation of the Visitor's arrival.¹⁰ Looking at the period after the end of the war, therefore, it is worth noting that the *visita ad limina* of 1948 did not coincide with the first occasion on which the Holy See was able to receive extensive information on the condition of the Catholic Church in Germany.

2 An Awkward Post-War Period: The *relationes* of 1948

“Die Not ist groß, ist riesengroß” (The need is great, is huge): this assertion appeared no less than four times in the collective pastoral letter of August 1947 in which the German bishops highlighted the difficulties of the post-war period, looking at both material and moral-religious aspects.¹¹ The *relationes* delivered to the Holy See during the following year, when German territory was still divided into zones of occupation, were in turn a mirror of the problems that afflicted the population and which inevitably also affected the activity of the Catholic clergy. In many regions, the organisation of pastoral care (*Seelsorge*) underwent a very severe test because of the arrival of the *Heimatvertriebene*, all the more so when at the same time numerous places of worship had been damaged or destroyed as a consequence of the wartime devastation and the number of priests was insufficient in relation to requirements (*Priestermangel*). In some cases the displacement of people was so great that it profoundly changed the denominational face of the dioceses: in his *relatio* of 1948, the Bishop of Fulda Johann Baptist Dietz (1879-1959) reported, for ex-

⁸ Concerning Muench and the Papal Mission of Kronberg – which operated until 1951 – see especially Alsheimer, *Der Vatikan in Kronberg*; Barry, *American Nuncio*; Brown-Fleming, *The Holocaust and Catholic Conscience*.

⁹ Cf. *Rapporto generale*.

¹⁰ Cf. Aloisius Muench to Josef Frings (archbishop of Cologne), 9 September 1946. Helbach, *Westliche Besatzungszonen*, 778-9.

¹¹ Cf. *Hirtenwort des deutschen Episkopats*, 21 August 1947. Helbach, *Westliche Besatzungszonen*, 1293-301.

ample, more than 800,000 Catholics under his jurisdiction, when before the war there had been only 370,000;¹² on the other hand, the Bishop of Passau Simon Konrad Landersdorfer (1880-1971) associated the arrival of a large number of non-Catholics from the East with the loss of the (almost) totally Catholic aspect of the Bavarian diocese (*"facies catholica Dioecesis in perpetuum evanuit"*).¹³ The migrations significantly increased the phenomenon of the 'diaspora', i.e., the dispersion of Catholic communities in geographical areas dominated by Protestants: a situation that for a Catholic priest was synonymous with severe complications in fulfilling the *Seelsorge*. It was in the territories of the diaspora that the problem of the lack of churches, or at least of churches with the capacity to accommodate a considerably larger Catholic population, was now most acute. And it was precisely the parishes of the (old or new) diaspora, on the other hand, that usually presented the worst data regarding the observance of the Church's precepts.

With the end of the war, the episcopate nurtured the hope of a return to God of the German people, of a religious renaissance above the rubble of Hitler's 'neo-paganism', and at the same time urged Catholics to build a new Germany with a clear and lasting Christian stamp. The aspiration for a 'Christianisation' (*Verchristlichung*) of post-war German society¹⁴ permeated various statements issued by the ecclesiastical authority in the period following the fall of the National Socialist regime. This was the case, for instance, of a pastoral letter promulgated by the bishops of the western dioceses in June 1945, with the concept of the 'fear of God' (*"Ehrfurcht vor Gott"*) at its centre: it expressed the conviction that the construction of a new order after the tragedy of the war should be based on respect for divine law, on a return to the observance of God's commandments that had previously been neglected – with disastrous consequences.¹⁵ Soon, however, the episcopate would realise that the much longed-for religious revival was in fact an illusion: the 1948 *relationes* of Albert Stohr (1890-1961), bishop of Mainz,¹⁶ and Ferdinand Dirichs (1894-1948), bishop of Limburg,¹⁷ offer clear evidence of this awareness.

¹² Cf. Fulda 1948 (no page numbers).

¹³ Passau 1948, 9.

¹⁴ In this regard see Löhr, "Rechristianisierungsvorstellungen"; Repgen, "Die Erfahrung des Dritten Reiches", 136-42.

¹⁵ *Hirtenwort der westdeutschen Bischöfe*, 5 June 1945. Volk, *Akten deutscher Bischöfe*, 521-9.

¹⁶ "Sperabamus, quod recuperata libertate religiosa post interitum 'socialismi nationalis' vita religiosa reforesceret, sed haec spes fefellit" (Mainz 1948, 21).

¹⁷ "Licet statim post bellum finitum aestus quidam vitae religiosae [...] observatus sit, tamen dolendum est, istum fervorem religiosum iamiam plus minusve decrevisse" (Limburg 1948, 26).

From the German *relationes*, it emerges how in rural regions religious practice was much more deeply rooted than in urban areas, and especially in the large cities. Traditionally, the countryside offered priests engaged in pastoral care more consoling scenarios than the industrial contexts:¹⁸ there the secularisation of mentality and customs had a harder time imposing itself, and the percentage of those who habitually attended Sunday Mass or fulfilled the Easter precept proved this.¹⁹ Among the factors responsible for having inflicted damage on the moral and religious life of Catholic communities, some bishops mentioned the National Socialist regime with its ideology, which had been particularly harmful to youth, but also the experience of the war.²⁰ However, what most alarmed the episcopate in this regard was the complicated situation of the German people at the time when the *relationes* were being written: it was precisely the widespread post-war deprivation, in fact, that was generally recognised as an element capable of distracting individuals from consideration of the religious dimension and respect for Christian norms.

This opinion had already been brought to the attention of Pius XII himself, so that in a letter of January 1947 the pope had reported the bishops' concern that an existence of hardship and suffering was for many a practically insurmountable obstacle to a return to religion.²¹ On the part of the German episcopate, in other words, a connection was established between material destitution and atrophy of the spiritual life. The *relationes ad limina* of 1948 provide many examples of this. I will mention just a few: the elderly Cardinal Archbishop of Munich Michael von Faulhaber (1869-1952) pointed out how the mores of the people gave the impression of worsening day by day because of the great penury;²² the Cardinal Bishop of Berlin Konrad von Preysing (1880-1950) wrote that many, worn out

¹⁸ On this aspect cf. Tacchi, *Katholischer Antisozialismus*, 157-70.

¹⁹ This was the case, among others, in the archdiocese of Cologne: "Praeceptum audiendi Missam diebus festis fideles in paroeciis ruralibus maxima ex parte observant, non raro omnes fere. In oppidis maioribus pars minor quam dimidium Sacro interest. [...] Virorum circiter 45-50 pro centum, mulierum circiter 65-70 pro centum communionem paschalem suscipiunt, sed differentia magna inter paroecias rurales et paroecias in oppidis maioribus locum habet" (Cologne 1948, 48).

²⁰ The Archbishop of Bamberg Joseph Otto Kolb (1881-1955) wrote, for example: "Ubique fides et mores christiani adhuc vigent, quamvis ob perversa Nazismi principia et belli atrocissimi (1939-1945) diuturnitatem et effectus vulnera hiantia religioni christianae sint porrecta" (Bamberg 1948, 52).

²¹ "Mehrere von euch weisen darauf hin [...], dass der Kampf mit der Not, das Ringen um die nackte Existenz, die geradezu zermürbende Bedrängnis durch Freude- und Hoffnungslosigkeit Hemmungen für einen religiösen Wiederaufstieg bilden, die für viele praktisch noch nicht überwindbar sind" (Pius XII to the German episcopate, 18 January 1947. Helbach, *Westliche Besatzungszonen*, 963-71: 969).

²² "Maxima penuria populi mores in dies peiores fieri videntur" (Munich 1948, 16).

by prolonged poverty, neglected their religious duties or even separated themselves from the Church “sub influxu atheismi”;²³ thinking of the condition of the *Heimatvertriebene*, the Archbishop of Paderborn Lorenz Jaeger (1892-1975) recognised the existence of an intimate link (“intimus nexus”) between the evils that threatened Christian life and political, economic and social calamities.²⁴

Several bishops expressed the fear that the continuing precarious post-war conditions might foster the propaganda of atheistic communism: some, on the other hand, went so far as to explicitly use the term ‘materialism’ to define an attitude found among the German civilians burdened by circumstances. In his *relatio* the Bishop of Osnabrück Hermann Wilhelm Berning (1877-1955) – at the head of that diocese since 1914! – reported on quite a few Catholics who in practice gave themselves over to materialism (“in praxi materialismum colunt”);²⁵ writing about the diocese of Fulda, Dietz mentioned the existence of a materialism increased by the misery of the population (“materialismus, adhuc auctus ex miseria populi”),²⁶ and similarly the Bishop of Aachen Johannes Joseph van der Velden (1891-1954) spoke of a materialistic spirit (“spiritus ille materialismi”) nourished by the concrete post-war difficulties.²⁷ This was, clearly, a materialism that was quite different from dialectical materialism and therefore from Marxism: rather, by this term the bishops generally referred to an almost exclusive focus on material needs dictated by the state of extreme necessity, which left practically no room for consideration of the religious sphere, and which could be accompanied by an accentuated search for sensible pleasures in a context of great deprivation.

The *relationes* also reveal how the German episcopate, in the post-war period, was greatly anxious about the preservation of the Christian family and respect for morality within married life. Often the conflict had put a strain on the relationship between spouses – as well as that between parents and children – particularly because of the long absence from home of men engaged in combat or held as prisoners. In the *relationes* of 1948, many bishops pointed out with regret phenomena such as the increase in the number of divorces and the practice of birth control, with the latter usually attributed to the economic difficulties of families. Bishop Michael Keller of Münster

²³ “Multi defatigati sunt ob continuatam inopiam, officia religiosa neglegunt, immo ab ecclesia prorsus sub influxu atheismi deficiunt” (Berlin 1948, 48).

²⁴ “Quo patet quidam intimus nexus inter mala, quibus vita christiana periclitatur, et calamitates politicas, oeconomicas et sociales, quae nostram facultatem omnino excedunt” (Paderborn 1948, 39).

²⁵ Osnabrück 1948 (no page numbers).

²⁶ Fulda 1948 (no page numbers).

²⁷ Aachen 1948, 26.

(1896-1961) mentioned the internal dissolution of family life (“*interna dissolutio vitae familiaris*”) as one of the most serious concerns of the present time.²⁸ A further alarming factor was the growth of religiously mixed marriages (*Mischehen*),²⁹ which, according to the ecclesiastical authority, seriously exposed Catholics to the danger of religious indifferentism, and which Cardinal Faulhaber even described as the greatest cross (“*maxima crux*”) for the clergy.³⁰ The increase of *Mischehen* after the war was determined to a considerable extent by the arrival of the millions of *Heimatvertriebene*, which led to a greater confessional mixture on German territory: this did not go unnoticed by the bishops.³¹ The interest in the preservation of the Christian family did not diminish during the 1950s, nor did the concern for the proliferation of mixed marriages: indeed, in January 1958, these became the specific subject of a collective pastoral letter resulting from an internal debate within the episcopal body.³²

3 The 1950s and the ‘Double’ Materialist Threat

With the formal creation of the FRG and the GDR in 1949, German territory was definitively included in the contraposition between the blocs that characterised the Cold War. During the 1950s, therefore, the Catholic Church found itself operating in two profoundly different contexts. In the East, in addition to adapting to a regime of total separation from the state, it had to reckon with measures of the political authority which restricted its activities in various ways, and which especially between 1952 and 1953 recalled the dark days of National Socialist persecution. Against the pervasive influence of Communist ideology, the bishops of the eastern dioceses were forced to devise strategies to protect the small Catholic minority.³³ From 1950 onward they formed their own conference, which later became known as *Berliner Ordinarienkonferenz*: this, however, was only meant to be

²⁸ Münster 1948, 19.

²⁹ On this subject cf. Bendikowski, “Eine Fackel der Zwietracht”.

³⁰ Munich 1948, 7.

³¹ The Bishop of Rottenburg Joannes Baptista Sproll (1870-1949) wrote in his 1948 *relatio*: “Numerus matrimoniorum mixtorum de anno in annum crescit, quia multi catholici ex regionibus orientalibus in partes protestanticas Württembergici status translocati sunt. Ibi vivunt inter maiorem numerum acatholicorum et cum eis matrimonia ineunt” (Rottenburg 1948, 11).

³² Cf. *Protokoll der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz*, 24-27 September 1957. Hürten, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 447-61: 448.

³³ Regarding the condition of the Catholic Church in the German Democratic Republic see especially Kösters, Tischner, *Katholische Kirche*; Pilvousek, *Die katholische Kirche*; Raabe, *SED-Staat*; Schäfer, *Staat und katholische Kirche*; Tischner, *Katholische Kirche*.

a regional assembly within the German bishops' plenary conference.³⁴

Much more favourable was the situation in the West, where the Church enjoyed ample freedom and leeway to act within society, and where the proportion of Catholics to Protestants had increased following the division into two states.³⁵ Already between 1948 and 1949, therefore, the episcopate could try to influence the decisions of the Parlamentarischer Rat – the body in charge of drafting a constitution for West Germany – in the conviction that it was facing a decisive step for the future of the Church and German Catholicism.³⁶ The charter finally approved in May 1949, however, was only partially satisfactory for the ecclesiastical authority. Just three months later, then, the first federal elections sanctioned the victory of the CDU/CSU, followed by the beginning of the long chancellorship of Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967). On a different level, the economic boom that followed the currency reform (*Währungsreform*) of 1948 and the Marshall Plan had a positive impact on the living conditions and changed the physiognomy of West German society. Nevertheless, not only did it not pave the way for the religious renaissance that the bishops had considered possible at the end of the war, but it also led to the spread of a consumerist ethos that the episcopate itself was quick to stigmatise, seeing in it a tangible sign of a departure from Christian moral values.

In the final years of Pius XII's pontificate, in fact, the German bishops had the impression that they were confronted with a fearsome 'double' materialist threat: of 'practical' materialism in West Germany, and of dialectical materialism in the GDR.³⁷ An emblematic example of this is the *relatio ad limina* written by Bishop Dietz in September 1958 about a diocese of Fulda divided in two by the 'Iron Curtain': in the West the life of Catholics was conditioned by liberalism and 'practical' materialism, in the East by dialectical materialism

³⁴ The bishops of Fulda, Paderborn, Osnabrück and Würzburg, who all resided in the FRG, participated only indirectly in the Berliner Ordinarienkonferenz. Here they were represented by the vicars and *Kommissare* who were responsible for the ecclesiastical administration of the part of those dioceses which was included in the GDR (Generalvikariat Erfurt, Erzbischöfliches Kommissariat Magdeburg, Bischöfliches Kommissariat Schwerin, Bischöfliches Kommissariat Meiningen).

³⁵ In 1950 51.2% of West Germans were Protestant, 45.2% Catholic (cf. Collotti, *Storia delle due Germanie*, 566-7). For introductory remarks about the situation of Catholicism in West Germany during the 1950s cf. Doering-Manteuffel, "Kirche und Katholizismus"; Gabriel, "Katholizismus und katholisches Milieu".

³⁶ On this subject cf. Gotto, "Die katholische Kirche"; van Schewick, "Die katholische Kirche". Furthermore, the documents in Mertens, *Westliche Besatzungszonen und Gründung*.

³⁷ Since the 19th century, the term 'materialism' had been associated, in Catholic culture, with the various intellectual and political currents (including communism) that contradicted the natural law and the Church's social doctrine: it therefore had a decidedly negative connotation. Cf. Kösters, *DDR 1951-1957*, 27.

promoted and spread by the political authority.³⁸ Discontent with behaviour and trends that were taking hold in the emerging affluent society characterised many *relationes* of the 1950s. In 1953, for example, the Bishop of Eichstätt Joseph Schröffer (1903-1983) wrote that even in his diocese the materialistic contagion was to be noted: this manifested itself in an unbridled desire for pleasures, untameable licence, light-heartedness and a shirking of sacrifice.³⁹ The Bishop of Trier Matthias Wehr (1892-1967) feared that the Catholic faith of the people would be weakened and morals corrupted by the growing lust for earthly goods and sensual pleasures.⁴⁰ Five years later, the Bishop of Speyer Isidor Markus Emanuel (1905-1991) informed the Roman Curia that many of his diocesans had recently experienced an improvement in their living conditions, but that this had resulted in spiritual harm: they were striving in vain to serve two masters, namely God and Mammon, and infected by 'practical' materialism they did not seek the things of heaven, but those of earth.⁴¹

Particularly interesting is a remark by the Cardinal Archbishop of Munich Joseph Wendel (1901-1960) – who succeeded Faulhaber in 1952 – in his *relatio* of May 1958. Here he alluded to a change that had occurred in the causes of the population's moral decline, or rather in the relationship between socio-economic aspects and the moral-religious dimension: if at first – Wendel wrote – mores had been marred by poverty, later on they had been negatively affected by an abundance of available goods.⁴² On the part of the episcopate, the 'practical' materialism associated with the West German society of the 1950s was probably perceived as a greater danger than the materialism induced by the state of generalised destitution in early post-war Germany: certainly, however, it had to appear less excusable.

38 "Graves contra fidem errores inter fideles in occidentali dioecesis parte non serpunt. In practicam autem catholicorum vitam liberalismus ac 'materialismus practicus' hodierni mundi se immiscet. In zona sovietica materialismus dialecticus a gubernio civili fovetur et propagatur; hoc est praecipuum periculum pro fidelibus, praesertim pro iuventute" (Fulda 1958, no page numbers).

39 "Materialismo hodierno etiam nostrorum finium homines attinguntur et contagione inficiuntur, scil[icet] effrenata voluptatum cupidine, indomita licentia, levitate animi, timore et fuga sacrificiorum" (Eichstätt 1953, 39).

40 "Attamen timendum est ne, crescente in dies cupiditate rerum terrestrium et voluptatum, fides catholica [...] nimis debilitetur et mores populi corrumpantur" (Trier 1953, 40).

41 "Ultimis annis permulti fideles prospere profecerunt in bonis temporalibus, sed mundum lucrantes animae suae detrimentum passi sunt. In vanum conantur duobus dominis servire, Deo scilicet et mammonae. Materialismo practico infecti non quaerunt quae supra sunt, sed quae super terram" (Speyer 1958, 18).

42 "Primum rerum inopia deinde rerum abundantia mores populi in multis sunt depravati" (Munich 1958, 27).

It was mainly with urban contexts that the ‘practical’ materialism identified by the bishops was associated, and yet in the *relationes* of the 1950s there is no lack of indications of concern about its extension to the countryside, as a consequence of the narrowing socio-cultural differences between urban and rural areas and the development of modern means of communication and transport. In the diocese of Limburg, according to the 1958 *relatio* of Bishop Wilhelm Kempf (1906-1982), the religious spirit was gradually diminishing even in the rural regions, where ‘practical’ materialism was now influencing the minds of individuals as much as in the cities.⁴³ The Archbishop of Bamberg Josef Schneider (1906-1998) wrote, for his part, of a “spiritus materialisticus” that had also penetrated the villages and small towns – where, however, respect for Catholic traditions within families was greater than in the larger centres.⁴⁴ The rural communities – putting to one side the complications typical of diaspora areas – continued to stand out for the proportion of the faithful who regularly attended liturgical services and more generally for the vigour of religious life. It was precisely because of this characteristic that the Catholic hierarchy could not but interpret all the more negatively the phenomenon of abandonment of the countryside – which resulted in the expansion of the urban peripheries – and the signs of a progressive cultural ‘rapprochement’ between city and rural dwellers. It is no coincidence that in his 1953 *relatio*, the Bishop of Würzburg Julius Döpfner – later called to lead the dioceses of Berlin and Munich – voiced his deep concern about the looming secularisation of rural regions (“regionum ruralium imminenti saecularisatione”).⁴⁵

In the rise of the affluent society and the spread of ‘practical’ materialism, the German episcopate recognised a threat to family morality as well. The desire to enjoy the unprecedented availability of material goods, in particular, was often placed at the basis of the utilisation of methods to limit births – starting with the much-vituperated ‘conjugal onanism’ – with which not even Catholic couples were unfamiliar. In this respect, the *relationes* drawn up over a decade by the bishops of Aachen are indicative of how the opinion of the episcopate evolved regarding the origin of the problem. In 1948 Bishop van der Velden related the tendency to limit births to the difficult conditions in which the population was living at that time (“circumstantiae, in quibus versamur”);⁴⁶ five years later he again wrote “circum-

⁴³ “Ita spiritus religiosus etiam in regionibus catholicis agrestibus paulatim minuitur, materialismus practicus ibi mentes hominum saltem aequae occupat ac in civitatibus” (Limburg 1958, 16).

⁴⁴ Bamberg 1958, 47.

⁴⁵ Würzburg 1953, 25.

⁴⁶ Aachen 1948, 22.

stantiae, in quibus versamur”, but added “et spiritus materialismi”;⁴⁷ in 1958, finally, his successor Johannes Pohlschneider (1899-1981) identified precisely the materialistic spirit as the main cause of the phenomenon (“plurimi coniuges revera e spiritu materialismi prolem limitant”).⁴⁸

The condemnation of ‘practical’ materialism did not remain confined to the *relationes ad limina*: during the 1950s, the ecclesiastical authority intervened publicly to warn the Catholic flock against it. After the bishops meeting in the Fulda Conference had approved a document in the summer of 1952 that lamented the estrangement of men from God (“Abwendung der Menschen von Gott”) and the secularisation of hearts (“Verweltlichung der Herzen”),⁴⁹ another joint pastoral letter promulgated in the winter of 1956 openly criticised the manifestations of ‘practical’ materialism and at the same time urged the faithful to do penance. This pastoral letter opened with a reference to the ‘heresy’ (“Irrlehre”) of *dialektischer Materialismus* prevailing in Eastern Europe and its attempts to capture the youth,⁵⁰ yet the focus of the German episcopate was precisely on *praktischer Materialismus*, which, while it did not result in an explicit denial of God and the afterlife, nevertheless led to living as if they did not exist. In their place – the bishops argued – a new idol had taken over, namely the so-called standard of living, the lust for possession and pleasure (“der sogenannte Lebensstandard, Besitz- und Genußgier”).⁵¹ To be stigmatised was essentially a conception of life, detectable in capitalist society, that seemed irreconcilable with Christian values: hence the bishops’ call to repent, not to fall further into a spiral of earthly enjoyments that stifled the needs of the spirit.

The decision to publish this document was taken at the bishops’ Conference in August 1955. On this occasion, the Cardinal Archbishop of Cologne Josef Frings (1887-1978), as chairman of the assembly, attempted to take stock of the decade since the end of the war: he underlined the economic recovery and the regained freedom of the Church in West Germany, while in the East about one sixth of German Catholics still had to live under a totalitarian state, whose ‘colour’ now was red instead of brown (“dessen Farbe von braun zu rot gewech-

⁴⁷ Aachen 1953, 33.

⁴⁸ Aachen 1958, 53.

⁴⁹ “Hirtenwort”, 76. Bishop Albert Stohr of Mainz attached a copy of this document to his 1953 *relatio*.

⁵⁰ *Hirtenbrief*, 3. The text is published in full in Kösters, *DDR 1951-1957*, 646-53. Bishop Stohr also submitted this document to the Roman Curia, as an annex to the 1958 *relatio*.

⁵¹ *Hirtenbrief*, 4.

selt hat").⁵² As dangers threatening the spiritual health of Catholics, Frings mentioned religious indifferentism and 'practical' materialism: harmful in itself, the latter, according to the cardinal, was moreover a forerunner of dialectical materialism.⁵³ Frings, that is, explicitly connected the two sides of the 'double' materialist threat.

The *relationes ad limina* of the dioceses whose territory was wholly or partly included within the borders of the GDR are not without references to the complicated situation of the Catholic Church in the state subject to the influence of the Soviet Union. As is well known, the idea of the irreducible opposition of Catholicism and communism was an integral part of the Magisterium of the Holy See, and in times not so distant had found clear expression in the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* of Pope Pius XI (19 March 1937).⁵⁴ Only a few months before the birth of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik, then, such an idea was reaffirmed by the decree of the Holy Office that established the excommunication of those Catholics who were members of Communist parties or supported them in various ways (1 July 1949).⁵⁵ The same document, in March 1950, became the object of an explicit reference by the German episcopate in a pastoral letter entitled *Die christliche Wahrheit und der gottlose Materialismus* (The Christian truth and the atheistic materialism), which in substance constituted a critique of the ideological and political foundations of the East German state.⁵⁶

In his *relatio* dated 1 November 1953, Konrad von Preysing's successor on the bishop's seat in Berlin, Wilhelm Weskamm (1891-1956), described a diocese where Catholics made up about 12% of the total population, and where only a little more than a quarter attended Sunday Mass and less than a third fulfilled the Easter precept. While the economic hardship was still far from over, atheistic communism ("communismus atheisticus") strove to win over the younger generation in particular.⁵⁷ Public life did not reveal a Christian or more generally religious aspect ("publica vita [...] generatim nec christianum nec religiosum praebebat aspectum"):⁵⁸ in addition to this, there were

⁵² *Ansprache Frings' auf der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz*, 23 August 1955. Mertens, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 873-88: 875.

⁵³ "Dass diese praktische Abwendung von Gott, auch bei Aufrechterhaltung eines gewissen äußeren religiösen korrekten Verhaltens, dem dialektischen Materialismus die Wege bereitet, liegt auf der Hand" (*Ansprache Frings' auf der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz*, 23 August 1955. Mertens, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 873-88: 884).

⁵⁴ Cf. AAS, 29 (1937), 65-106. Cf. Chenu, *L'ultima eresie*, 70-5.

⁵⁵ Cf. AAS, 41 (1949), 334.

⁵⁶ *Die christliche Wahrheit und der gottlose Materialismus*, 1 March 1950. Lange, *Katholischer Kirche*, 35-41.

⁵⁷ Berlin 1953, 15.

⁵⁸ Berlin 1953, 56.

obstacles to the activity of the clergy and the bishop himself. On 7 October 1958 – two days before the death of Pius XII –, Bishop Otto Spülbeck (1904-1970) produced his *relatio* for the diocese of Meißen in Saxony, the only eastern diocese with no part of its territory outside the GDR.⁵⁹ Here, Catholics constituted only 7.5% of the population, and the official state doctrine (“materialismus dialecticus et historicus”) exerted a deleterious influence on them.⁶⁰ The Christian life of families was weakened both by the context shaped by atheism and by the religious indifferentism stemming from mixed marriages, which were extremely widespread: around one third of the faithful, however, were actually committed to living according to Catholic principles.⁶¹ Worship could take place freely within the sacred buildings – which were still too few to satisfy requirements – while public practices such as processions and pilgrimages met not infrequently with hindrances or prohibitions by the civil authorities. Such a problem was also highlighted by other Ordinaries, for example by Archbishop Lorenz Jaeger in his 1953 *relatio* – he had already done so in 1948. The vast archdiocese of Paderborn was one of those directly crossed by the ‘Iron Curtain’, and thus – to use Jaeger’s own words – was in a certain sense divided in two by a wall (“quasi per murum est in duas partes divisa”).⁶²

The same fate had befallen the diocese of Osnabrück, since the northern region of Mecklenburg was part of the GDR. The last pages of the *relatio* written in August 1958 by Bishop Helmut Hermann Wittler (1913-1987) were dedicated to the difficulties of the *Seelsorge* in that area, and above all expressed the churchman’s disquiet about a youth to whom the path of apostasy was insistently suggested. Wittler made mention of the *Jugendweihe* (“consecration of youth”),⁶³ identified by the German episcopate as a practice aimed at initiating adolescents into atheism and therefore separating them from the Church: it is no coincidence that in 1958 the Bishop of Fulda Dietz expressly spoke of an atheistic rite (“ritus atheisticus”).⁶⁴ Announced in 1954 and carried out for the first time the following year, the *Jugendweihe* was one of the instruments with which the Socialist state tried to transmit its *Weltanschauung* to the new generations

59 “Alle Jurisdiktionsbezirke in der DDR haben einen gewichtigen Teil ihres Bereiches respektive ihrer Priester in der Bundesrepublik mit Ausnahme von Meißen, das ganz in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik liegt” (Otto Spülbeck to Aloisius Muench, 6 March 1957. Schulte-Umberg, *DDR 1957-1961*, 43-4: 43).

60 Meißen 1958, 11.

61 “Vita christiana privata in familiis tum ambiente atheo tum saepius indifferentismo ex matrimonio mixtae religionis oborto extenuatur, tamen circiter tertia pars fidelium revera omnibus viribus catholice vivere studet” (Meißen 1958, 48).

62 Paderborn 1953, 19.

63 Cf. Osnabrück 1958, 37.

64 Fulda 1958, (no page numbers).

and to combat the influence of the Christian Churches: specifically, it was a sort of rite of passage to adulthood – preceded by a special preparation – in which young people swore allegiance to the cause of socialism and to the state itself.⁶⁵ The East German bishops immediately took a stance against it, and their denunciation was also expressed in the form of a joint declaration of October 1955, which indeed manifested the ecclesiastical authority's opposition to what appeared to be a kind of socialist 'confirmation' and was judged incompatible with the profession of Catholic faith.⁶⁶

The bishops' apprehension for the persistence of the Catholic faith among youth was amplified by the character of public education in the GDR. Immediately after the end of the war, the German episcopate had taken steps to see the re-introduction of the denominational school (*Bekenntnisschule*) previously abolished by the National Socialist regime, and in fact in the 1950s this constituted the mainstay of primary education in most West German dioceses. Where the common school for Catholic and Protestant pupils (*Gemeinschaftsschule* or *Simultanschule*) was the norm, this was generally due to the greater demographic weight of the Protestants and the prevalence of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) on the political scene, as in the *Länder* of Hesse and Lower Saxony. Even in these institutes, however, religious instruction, separated by denomination, was always guaranteed. In the GDR, by contrast, religion was not included in the curricula of public schools: not only that, but more generally these served as a powerful vehicle for the propagation of the Socialist state's ideology. In the 1958 *relatio*, Otto Spülbeck wrote not without reason of schools where the principles of atheistic materialism were openly taught and penetrated, as far as possible, into the minds of the pupils.⁶⁷ To back him up, the bishop of Meißen already had some collective pronouncements of the East German ecclesiastical authority against such a situation: a pastoral letter addressed to the faithful in January 1953 had specifically bemoaned the schools without religion where materialism reigned,⁶⁸ and exhorted Catholic parents to

65 Cf. Pilvousek, *Die katholische Kirche*, 423-9; Raabe, *SED-Staat*, 184-7.

66 This document concluded with a peremptory statement: "Wer freiwillig an der Jugendweihe und ihrer Vorbereitung teilnimmt oder seine Kinder dazu schickt, sündigt gegen den Glauben, bringt seinen und den Glauben seiner Kinder in ernste Gefahr und gibt der Gemeinde schwerstes Ärgernis durch schlechtes Beispiel" (*Hirtenbrief der Ordinarien in der DDR zur Jugendweihe*, [11 October 1955]. Kösters, *DDR 1951-1957*, 626-7: 627).

67 "Pueri scholas publicas frequentare tenentur, ubi placita materialismi athei ex professo traduntur et in quantum possibile pueris inculcantur" (Meißen 1958, 51).

68 "In diesen religionslosen Schulen wird der Materialismus gelehrt: vom materialistischen Geist sind die Lehr- und Lernbücher getragen und durchtränkt" (*Hirtenbrief der Ordinarien in der DDR über die christliche Erziehung*, [3 December 1952]. Kösters, *DDR 1951-1957*, 263-5: 263).

take care of the Christian education of their children; this exhortation had then returned in another document of October 1957, containing at the same time a new warning about the deplored *Jugendweihe*.⁶⁹

Still in the last weeks of Pius XII's pontificate, the 'double' materialist threat was object of the German episcopate's attention:⁷⁰ but clearly the possibilities of defence and reaction appeared different between East and West, as did the stakes. The struggle sustained by the Catholic Church in the German Democratic Republic, where the Socialist state strove daily to undermine its internal compactness and to emphasise the irrelevance of the religious phenomenon, took on the contours, ultimately, of a protracted struggle for survival.

4 Concluding Remarks

In the 1958 *relatio*, and more specifically in the *iudicium sintheticum* drafted at the end of the document, Cardinal Wendel defined 'practical' materialism as a great danger of his time ("magnum nostrae aetatis periculum").⁷¹ But the letter of response that the Consistorial Congregation sent a few months later to the archbishop of Munich himself, and which was based on what the latter had reported, spoke instead of "materialismus practicus" as the greatest danger of the present ("maximum nostrae huius aetatis periculum").⁷² The Roman body's choice of a different adjective, which certainly cannot be read as coincidental, points to the question of the Holy See's perception of the phenomenon, as well as that of the possible differences of opinion that might have existed among the various Roman dicasteries in this respect. At the same time, it is legitimate to wonder whether and how the input from Germany – through the *relationes ad limina*, but not only – contributed to shaping the point of view of the head of the Catholic Church. These are questions that still await an adequate answer from historiographical research, and will necessarily have to be addressed also on the basis of the documentation of the Vatican Apostolic Archive that has recently become available for consultation.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Hirtenwort der Berliner Ordinarienkonferenz*, 23 October 1957. Schulte-Umberg, *DDR 1957-1961*, 186-9.

⁷⁰ Thus the German bishops in a collective pastoral letter promulgated by the Fulda Conference in August 1958: "In der Fastenzeit des Jahres 1956 schrieben wir einen gemeinsamen Hirtenbrief über die Gefahr des dialektischen Materialismus als einer grundsätzlichen Gottesleugnung und des praktischen Materialismus als einer gelebten Abkehr von Gott. *Auch diese doppelte Gefahr ist inzwischen gewachsen*" (*Hirtenwort der deutschen Bischöfe*, 20 August 1958. Schulte-Umberg, *DDR 1957-1961*, 379-83: 380; italics added).

⁷¹ Munich 1958, 32.

⁷² Consistorial Congregation 1959 (no folio numbers).

The five-yearly reports, it should be borne in mind, were only one of the means that the bishops had at their disposal to inform Rome of the situation in their dioceses. The Consistorial Congregation, furthermore, could not appear as the privileged interlocutor to whom the most urgent and complex issues were to be submitted in order to obtain suggestions and instructions, quite the contrary: for this there was rather the Secretariat of State led by Pius XII himself.⁷³ The understanding of the actual relevance of the problems reported by the episcopate in the *relationes*, which on the other hand responded to a predetermined questionnaire and were inevitably influenced by the life history and personality of their authors, cannot therefore disregard the parallel analysis of other types of documents, i.e., sources that supplement the information contained in the *relationes* themselves. It is precisely an operation of this kind that confirms that the 'double' materialist threat was a real and constant concern for the German episcopate during the 1950s. Although Catholicism certainly faced greater challenges in the East than in the West, even here the picture was not entirely without shadows. Only a few months after the promulgation of the pastoral letter on materialism in the winter of 1956, Pius XII, in a radio message to the Catholics gathered in Cologne for the *Katholikentag* (Catholic Day), seemed to make the worries of the German bishops his own, urging the faithful who lived in a materialistic world ("in einer materialistischen Welt") to reverse the order of priority between the material and spiritual dimensions and thus to put God first.⁷⁴ The pope's words addressed the German context and certainly based on the information available to the Holy See about Germany. On the other hand, however, it may be useful to frame the matter from a broader perspective. The recognition, in parallel with the rapid economic growth of the Western world, of a form of materialism which did not coincide with the dialectical materialism of the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, and which in fact had its roots in the capitalist system was not only characteristic of the German Church. In order to assess the importance held by this aspect in the final years of Pius XII's pontificate – as well as afterwards, at the time of the Second Vatican Council⁷⁵ – there is therefore

73 It is well known that after the death of Cardinal Luigi Maglione (1877-1944) Pius XII renounced the appointment of a new Secretary of State and personally assumed the leadership of the dicastery. He held it until the end of his pontificate, availing himself for years of the collaboration of Domenico Tardini (1888-1961) and Giovanni Battista Montini (1897-1978).

74 "Il radiomessaggio ai cattolici di Germania", 397. The radio message was broadcast on 2 September 1956.

75 It should be noted, in this regard, that an explicit reference to 'practical' materialism ("plurimi sane, quorum vita materialismo practico inficitur...") occurs in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of December 1965 (AAS, 58 (1966), 1025-120: 1032).

the possibility of a comparative approach examining various Catholicisms of the Western bloc. Finally, what has been said in the previous pages leads to the observation that the *relationes ad limina* can also be considered as a starting point for the identification of potential research topics: as a ‘synthetic overview’ that lends itself to the subsequent development of both local history subjects and – as I have tried to do in this paper – reflections on a national case.

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***Progressismus gallicus* in French and Belgian *relationes ad limina* from 1947 to 1957**

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Abstract The Church of Pius XII was faced with the major problem of secularisation that accompanied the modernisation of European society. In the post-World War II Catholic world, France and Belgium were pioneers in seeking new pastoral methods that could reach out and involve, in particular, the workers, that social class which was most sensitive to the dynamics of de-Christianisation and religious indifferentism. The *relationes ad limina* of the period allow us to reconstruct a lively and innovative ecclesial landscape, within which the experience of worker priests was the best-known and most debated pastoral response, but not the only one. This article describes this tendency towards pastoral experimentation in France and Belgium between 1947 and 1957, at a time when Pius XII seemed to view *Progressismus gallicus* with fear and concern, but also with some hope.

Keywords Worker priests. Petites Soeurs de Jesus. Progressive Catholicism. *Relationes ad limina*. Secularism. Pius XII. France. Belgium Magdeleine Hutin.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Dioceses and the Documentary Material. – 3 The Church-State Relationship in France and Belgium. – 4 Enemies of the Faith: “a people immersed in error and materialism”. – 5 The Proposed Solutions: Modifications to Traditional Structures. – 6 The Solutions Proposed: *Fit experimentum, experimur*. – 6.1 Socio-Religious Research Applied to Pastoral Work. – 6.2 The Worker Nuns. – 6.3 The Société des prêtres et des soeurs du Prado, the Société de la Sainte Famille. – 6.4 Missionaries of Work and the Secrétariat national de la mission ouvrière. – 6.5 The Mission de France of Pontigny. – 6.6 The Worker Priests. – 7 Conclusions.



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1 Introduction

Progressismus gallicus: the Spanish Bishop Gregorio Modrego y Casaús used this term in 1957 to refer to the erroneous tendency of some of his priests whom he judged to be led by false zeal, but who once reprimanded, immediately repented.¹ The bishop then distinguished *progressismus gallicus* from Protestantism, from theosophism, from spiritualism, and also from modernism, because modernism, allegedly, was neither present among the faithful nor among the clergy. The same term had been used in 1954 by Paolo Marella, the apostolic nuncio to France, in a report addressed to the secretary of the Holy Office, Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo, in which he reported on worker priests.²

But what did Bishop Modrego y Casaús mean by *progressismus gallicus*? Who or what was he talking about? Which French realities was he referring to? And Monsignor Marella? In essence, what did French progressivism consist of in the eyes of ecclesial observers from outside France? And how did the Church of Pius XII view this tendency in France and Belgium? To what post-World War II problems did the French Church seek to respond with these pastoral policies judged to be “progressive”? Did the *progressismus gallicus* only concern means and instruments of evangelisation, or did it end up questioning doctrinal, liturgical and theological aspects as well?

Using the *ad limina* visits of French and Belgian bishops as documentary sources, this investigation attempts to answer these questions already addressed by historiography; the research therefore does not aim to offer new knowledge on the question of French progressivism, but to consolidate established historiographical trends through sources not available up to now.

By interpreting these sources we will arrive at the conclusion that the term *progressismus gallicus* indicated not only the action of the worker priests, but also a set of innovative pastoral proposals and attempts – the ‘Gallicanism’ of which Émile Poulat speaks, describing it as “the French way of solving problems, different from the Roman way”³ – of which the worker priests⁴ were, it is true, the most debated and, if you like, radical aspect, but not the only one. It was a tendency towards pastoral experimentation – “an openness to the world and

1 Barcelona 1957, 31. I thank Enrico Baruzzo for the reference.

2 Excerpt from Report No. 2362/54 of 21 April 1954 by the Apostolic Nuncio in France on worker priests, concerning “Progressivism”; sent by Paolo Marella to Giuseppe Pizzardo on 5 May 1955 (Marella, *Rapporto n. 2362/54*).

3 Poulat, “Chiesa e mondo moderno”, 297; Bigo, *Le progressisme*; Duriez et al., *Chrétiens et ouvriers*. Unless otherwise stated, all translation are by the Author.

4 On the worker priests, cf. Poulat, *Naissance* and *Les Prêtres-Ouvriers*.

modern culture”, says Poulat⁵ – perhaps not organic, but certainly organised and widespread in the French and Belgian dioceses; an experimentation to which Rome looked, certainly with fear, but perhaps also with some hope, indecisive at first, in this “crisis of conscience between Rome and France”,⁶ between condemnation and approval.

Certainly the *ad limina* letters should be analysed by reflecting on the textual genre that was peculiar to them. On this question, common to all the articles in this monographic issue, please refer to the introduction of this volume.⁷

However, the *relations* allow us to reconstruct a point of view – that of a new ‘Gallicanism’ –, the problems present, the proposed solutions, the centre-periphery relations, the vitality of a system.

2 The Dioceses and the Documentary Material

The French Church was present throughout the territory, with thousands of parishes and more than a hundred bishops and dioceses. Since it is not possible to analyse all the *relations ad limina* sent between 1947 (the first *relatio* sent in the period after World War II) and 1957 (the last *relatio* viewable at the time of the opening of the archives), the proximity of the dioceses to the history of the working class priests and the new problem of evangelisation of the working class was used as a criterion for selection.⁸ Table 1 lists the selected dioceses and their bishops.

Table 1 Dioceses and *relations* taken into consideration

Dioceses	<i>Relations</i>	Bishops
Paris	1947, 1952, 1957	Card. Emmanuel Suhard, Card. Maurice Feltin
Lille	1947, 1952, 1957	Card. Achille Liénard
Lyon	1947, 1952	Card. Pierre Paul Marie Gerlier
Marseille	1947, 1952	Mons. Jean Delay
Dijon	1947, 1952, 1957	Mons. Guillaume Sembel
Bayeux et Lisieux	1947, 1952, 1957	Mons. François Marie Picaud, Mons. André Jaquemin
Poitiers	1957	Mons. Henri Vion

⁵ Poulat, “Chiesa e mondo moderno”, 297.

⁶ “In Rome one is concerned above all with orthodoxy, with the integrity of doctrine, while in France some bishops consider the apostolic, pastoral, missionary urgency to be decisive” (Poulat, “Chiesa e mondo moderno”, 299). Cf. also Fouilloux, *Une Eglise*.

⁷ See also Menozzi, “L'utilizzazione”; Ricciardi Celsi, *Le relations ad limina*.

⁸ I thank Marta Margotti for her valuable advice on which dioceses to choose.

Dioceses	Relationes	Bishops
Mission de France-Pontigny	1956	prelatura nullius, Card. Achille Liénart
Reims	1947, 1952, 1957	Mons. Louis-Augustin Marmottin
Mechelen-Brussels	1947, 1952, 1957	Card. Jozef-Ernest van Roey

The *relationes* studied here are all rather voluminous and often the bishops find it necessary, in order to answer question 96 on social work and Catholic Action, to add a detailed and equally dense annex of some thirty pages. Many of the bishops are prominent figures in the history of the Catholic Church and three of them in particular (Gerlier, Liénart, Feltin and before him Suhard) acted as mediators with Pius XII regarding the demands of the worker priests in the 1950s, working diligently so that the worker priests could return to their job even after the 1954 condemnation.⁹ In the *relationes* the bishops are all generally rather obsequious and attentive to what might annoy the Roman interlocutor (they therefore often take care to emphasise that the Code of Canon Law was respected); at the same time, there are bishops – especially cardinals, but also Monsignor Marmottin from the vantage point of his venerable age – who show considerable room for movement and autonomy and also allow themselves the freedom to speak frankly of problems they have in their diocese (e.g., the use of French in the liturgy),¹⁰ of the changes they would expect from Rome (e.g., in the rules concerning Eucharistic fasting),¹¹ of diocesan practices that do not respect the canons,¹² of the worker priests – even after the *ultimatum* of the French bishops in 1954, strongly backed by Rome.¹³ Furthermore, Cardinal Gerlier allows himself to write all his reports in French, instead of Latin, despite the fact that it was pointed out to him already after the first time that “the canonical law of 4th November 1918 stipulates the use of Latin”.¹⁴ Bishops Lienhart and Marmottin do the same, using French for all information that they consider, as Marmottin says,

⁹ Margotti, *Lavoro*, 73-93; *Preti e operai*, 342-53.

¹⁰ Reims 1957, no. 19; Lille 1957, no. 19.

¹¹ Liénart (Lille 1952, no. 86), for example, writes that he would see it fit if the dispensation from Eucharistic fasting granted one day a week to workers for the evening Mass were granted every day of the week. The modification of the Eucharistic norms also characterised the claims of the worker priests (Margotti, *Lavoro*, 63-84). Indeed, the Roman interlocutor is alarmed and underlines it in red and with a question mark beside it.

¹² For example, on the inventory of the possessions of the diocese (Lille 1952, no. 13; Lyon 1947, nos. 8-11).

¹³ Cf. Margotti, *Lavoro*, 82-91. Also Dumont, *La condamnation*.

¹⁴ Lyon 1947, 34.

“modern matters”¹⁵ (Catholic and social action, the difficulties with communists and socialists) or for the sociological description of the diocese. The Roman interlocutor, however, seems to take lightly any such liberties committed by these bishops: he highlights them in red, adds question marks and reactions at the edge of the page; but, basically does not react, at least in writing, by asking for more discipline. For example, with regard to Cardinal Gerlier’s report, in French and not very thorough, the minutant writes: “The report, in itself, might not be... exceptional, but Lyon is Lyon, and Cardinal Gerlier is Cardinal Gerlier. It therefore seemed good to me to draft a brief, somewhat euphoric, reply”.¹⁶

3 The Church-State Relationship in France and Belgium

The French bishops complain in the *relations* about those legislative measures which at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries had radically diminished the Catholic Church’s influence on social life¹⁷ (in particular the 1882 law against the teaching of religion in state schools,¹⁸ the 1884 divorce law, the 1905 *Loi de séparation*). According to Cardinal Suhard,¹⁹ all laws which had been passed by Freemasons. Buildings such as churches and parsonages, but also cemeteries, were owned by the state or by diocesan associations;²⁰ there were no taxes or tithes and maintaining the clergy was the responsibility of the faithful.

The Church could fund schools, but according to French law had no right to own school buildings, which belonged to secular associations. All the *relations* attach great importance to free schools (*Ecoles libres*), which were supported by student fees and offerings from the faithful. Cardinal Suhard²¹ explains that the *profectus* of these schools is good for the pupils and the Church: indeed, many ecclesiastical vocations are born in these schools and the faith is transmitted.

¹⁵ Reims 1947, no. 96.

¹⁶ Lyon 1947, 32.

¹⁷ Rémond, *La secolarizzazione*; Pelletier, *Les catholiques*; Tranvouez, *Catholicisme*; Fouilloux, *Au coeur*; Poulat, *La question religieuse*.

¹⁸ According to Bishop Picaud (Bayeux et Lisieux 1947, no. 90), “Under the false guise of neutrality, the Christian religion in schools is silenced. Increasingly, this official neutrality becomes hostility”.

¹⁹ Paris 1947, no. 97.

²⁰ Cf. Poulat, *Les Diocésaines*.

²¹ Paris 1947, no. 91.

The *relations* also dwell on the *Loi Barangé* and the *Loi Marie*,²² which extended to students in private schools with graduate teachers the same financial aid that the State granted to students in State schools, but which were frowned upon by secularist political parties; furthermore, the *relations* express concern about the *Loi Billaères* being considered in Parliament, which would have helped State schools and not Catholic schools.²³

In Belgium the situation was different. Indeed, the bishop of Mechelen-Brussels²⁴ explains that by ancient custom, the ecclesiastical and civil authorities jointly supervised the conservation of ecclesiastical assets and possessions. In Belgium, too, great hopes were attached to school education, where the emphasis regarding relations between the State and the Church was not, as in France, on secularism: in all schools, including State schools, priests or trained lay people taught catechism and sacred history (with compulsory teaching at primary school, but for which exemptions grew as the students got older).²⁵

In both States, the war had caused people to flee the cities,²⁶ but in the post-war period the speed of the industrialisation process had caused increasing urbanisation to the extent that the city of Paris alone had more than 5 million inhabitants in 1957.²⁷

France had always been a Catholic stronghold: a powerful and widespread national Church. The number of personnel is astounding: in the diocese of Paris alone in 1947 Suhard could count on 23,000 religious members comprising male and female orders (falling to 11,000 by 1957).²⁸

As far as the ministry for workers was concerned, thanks to the JOC (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne) and Godin and Daniel's book *La France, Pays de mission?*, the French Church was experiencing a kind of "myth of origins".²⁹

The experience of the Service du Travail Obligatoire in Germany during the war had left its mark on civil society and also indicated new avenues for pastoral care: indeed, lay people and priests had experienced the unity between believers and workers, JOC adherents and communist militants, during the forced labour service in Germany.

²² Lille 1957, no. 90.

²³ Lille 1957, no. 90.

²⁴ Mechelen-Brussels 1952, no. 20.

²⁵ Mechelen-Brussels 1947, no. 90.

²⁶ The city of Dunkirk, almost destroyed by World War II, had 10,000 inhabitants in 1947, while in 1936 it had 31,000 (Lille 1947, no. 3).

²⁷ Paris 1957, no. 3. Lienhart (Lille 1957, no. 90) calls it *urbanism*: people move to live in cities and new Catholic schools should be built, but there is a lack of money.

²⁸ Paris 1947; 1957, no. 3.

²⁹ Margotti, *Lavoro*, 8.

Among the voices of the *nouvelle théologie*, there was a whole strand close to worker priests and social activism, which proposed a new vision of the priesthood (Chenu, Congar, Poulat). Following the pioneering experience of the Priests of Prado, the Mission de France and the Mission de Paris were born in 1941 and 1943, in an attempt to order and ‘institutionalise’ the passionate enthusiasm of the worker priests.

4 Enemies of the Faith: “a people immersed in error and materialism”³⁰

The major problem facing bishops and priests was what we might call the ‘shift in Catholic identity’, named according to the various nuances it took on in the eyes of individual bishops: materialism, de-Christianisation, atheism, rationalism,³¹ sensualism,³² religious indifference,³³ secularism, the father of vice and indifferentism.³⁴ No significant changes in terminology can be noted from a diachronic point of view. Certainly the problems between 1947 and 1957 were not exactly the same; however, by writing very substantial reports, the bishops tend to copy entire parts from the previous *relations*, modifying only the numerical data and percentages, but using the same terms and the same periphrases. The terms therefore change from bishop to bishop and not diachronically.

These trends in society were evident in certain moral and social dynamics that worried the bishops.

First of all, the decline of Sunday Mass attendance and of the observation of the Easter precept: while some dioceses spoke of it generically, in others the bishops were precise. In general, Sunday rest was observed, although not always in the countryside among those engaged in agricultural work; Sunday Mass was attended more by women than by men, the latter representing 35% in the diocese of Poitiers (1957), 25% in the diocese of Lille (1952-57), where only 2% among adult workers attended, and less than 20% in Bayeux et Lisieux (1957) and Reims (1947). The Easter precept was observed, again, more by women than by men, more in the countryside than in the cities. The data varied widely from diocese to diocese and even within the same diocese, as the working environment and gender varied. Certainly, however, they were numbers that worried the

³⁰ Lyon 1947, no. 34.

³¹ Mechelen-Brussels 1947, no. 16.

³² Lyon 1947, no. 100.

³³ Paris 1952, no. 100 speaks of “the indifference of the many and the hatred of the few”.

³⁴ Poitiers 1957, no. 84; Paris 1947, no. 100.

Catholic hierarchy: in Paris (1947) the Easter precept was observed by 20-25% of the faithful, in Lyon (1947) by 50% of women and less than 10% of men, with peaks of 1.6% in the city, in Mechelen-Brussels and Poitiers (1957) the average was 20%, fewer still in Poitiers (1947). Secondly, another way of measuring secularisation was “the aversion to piety and the sacraments”,³⁵ which was noticeable, for example, not so much in the failure to baptise children as in the delay with which parents took the child to the baptismal font, citing all kinds of excuses.³⁶ Thirdly, the bishops denounced the laxity of customs: in addition to civil marriages, there were many cohabitations, many divorces, civil funerals were on the rise and families tended to have fewer children³⁷ (only Bishop van Roey³⁸ uses the term “onanism” for birth control, but in all dioceses this problem is highlighted). Fourthly, young people lived in “softness”,³⁹ without discipline, “slaves of excessive desire for pleasure” (which is why Cardinal Suhard calls them “vain”⁴⁰); “they want to live according to their desires [...] and certain young women have habits devoid of values”.⁴¹ Fifthly, magazines harmful to the faith were widespread, but also “magazines that excite immoderate affection in the human heart, called ‘the press of the heart’ that have many readers and do great harm, especially to young girls”.⁴²

According to the bishops, the causes of this materialism and secularisation were due to different factors. First and foremost, the culprits were socialism and communism (no distinction is made between the two doctrines) spread especially among the workers because “they present themselves as a way to fight against capitalism and present the Church as a friend of capitalism”;⁴³ this “iniqua materialistarum doctrina” led the workers to gradually fall into vice.⁴⁴ Furthermore, new errors were mentioned including “Catholics who believe that an agreement can be reached with communism” and “are

³⁵ Lille 1947, no. 84.

³⁶ Paris 1947; 1952, no. 86.

³⁷ In Brussels, for example, 28% of families in 1910 had more than four children, while in 1947 the percentage had fallen to 12%; families with only one child in 1910 were 23%, in 1957 31% (Mechelen-Brussels 1957, no. 88).

³⁸ Marseille 1947, no. 87.

³⁹ Paris 1952, no. 100.

⁴⁰ Paris 1952, no. 100.

⁴¹ Paris 1952, no. 100.

⁴² Bayeux et Lisieux 1957, no. 54.

⁴³ Paris 1947, no. 98.

⁴⁴ Paris 1947, no. 98.

called the progressives".⁴⁵ Cardinals Suhard and Feltin,⁴⁶ in addition to communism, blamed secularist laws and neutral schools, along with the major problem, highlighted by all, of the war.

An observation needs to be made about the war, since all the reports – more those of 1947 and 1952 than those of 1957 – speak of it: in more detail those of the dioceses that had been directly affected by the conflict, in a more general way those that had only experienced the economic and social repercussions. In the diocese of Lille, for example, "the city of Dunkirk was almost destroyed by the recent war";⁴⁷ reconstruction was necessary not only for houses and schools, but also for sacred buildings, churches and for the deteriorated and ruined seminaries. Furnishings, sacred furniture, sacred vestments, church money had been destroyed or stolen.⁴⁸ The diocese of Reims had suffered the damages of World War II when it had not yet repaired those of the previous one. While in Paris the archbishop was preoccupied with building new churches because the population was growing fast (also because those who had fled during the conflict were returning to the city), in Lille the bishop was busy repairing churches and seminaries destroyed by the war. Poverty was widespread and because of this, families limited how many children they had and could not afford to send them to private schools.⁴⁹

In addition to material problems, according to Liénart,⁵⁰ in the absence of the head of the family, the bonds of paternal authority had been loosened, the scarcity and lack of harvests had been endured, so the desire to enjoy the goods of the present life had spread, and the "notorious propensity for illicit joys, after the abstinence of wartime" had grown, all of which "lead more or less grievously to a less honest life". The war had also affected the life of faith itself: for example, abstinence and fasting before taking communion had fallen into disuse because of the conflict. In wartime, the discipline of priests, who may have been obliged to military service, had also relaxed.⁵¹

The World War II had also brought the scourge of "double marriages" and, consequently, divorces: in Lille, many soldiers who had returned from the war found that their wives had remarried.⁵² Mixed and religiously disparate marriages had also increased (e.g., with

⁴⁵ Reims 1947, no. 16.

⁴⁶ Paris 1947; 1952; 1957, no. 100.

⁴⁷ Lille 1947, no. 3.

⁴⁸ Lille 1947, no. 100.

⁴⁹ Lille 1947, no. 93.

⁵⁰ Lille 1947, no. 84.

⁵¹ Paris 1947, no. 100.

⁵² Lille 1947, no. 87.

American soldiers),⁵³ in this group the bishop of Bayeux et Lisieux⁵⁴ also includes marriages with communists after the 1949 decree of the Holy Office.

The problem of Jews who had been baptised in order to save them from persecution also had to be addressed.⁵⁵

Furthermore, the French *relations* make no reference to the *Résistance* or the collaboration that took place in the territory during the conflict; on the other hand, the Belgian Bishop Van Roey points out that:

A truly serious and dangerous new problem to be feared is the number of citizens now in prison for unlawful “incivism”. The repression against citizens who in some way cooperated with the German enemy, and who have now all confessed, was too harsh, too broad and indiscriminate. The difficulty of rehabilitating those civilians in the bosom of the nation is not yet urgent, but will only be gradually resolved in the spirit of gentleness and Christian charity.⁵⁶

Finally, among the causes of materialism, in 1947 Suhard singled out tourists, who brought vices to Paris, but blaming foreigners and different religions was quite common: in almost all of the dioceses taken into consideration there was an increasingly multi-ethnic population and communism was widespread, and not only in Lille among the workers who came from abroad (in this case from Belgium).⁵⁷ What solutions did the bishops propose to these difficulties in their dioceses? An attempt was made to categorise the interventions by dividing them into ‘traditional’ solutions, which could probably be found in many of Pius XII’s other churches at that time, and more modern and innovative solutions, which probably characterised what outside observers would have catalogued as *progressismus gallicus*. What emerged were a number of decidedly innovative and ‘daring’ elements, so much so that the expression “fit experimentum” or “experimur” returns very often in the *relations*; these innovative elements sometimes concerned profoundly new pastoral experiments, such as worker priests or worker nuns, but also attempts to innovate traditional ministry methods from within.

⁵³ Reims 1947, no. 32.

⁵⁴ Bayeux et Lisieux 1957, no. 32.

⁵⁵ Paris 1947; 1952; 1957, no. 19.

⁵⁶ Mechelen-Brussels 1947, no. 47.

⁵⁷ Lille 1947; 1952; 1957, no. 84.

5 **The Proposed Solutions: Modifications to Traditional Structures**

The structure of ministry proposed by the French and Belgian bishops was the traditional one, based on the parish – so much so that the Paris reports state that “every Catholic action arises from the parish and has the parish as its goal”⁵⁸ – in its three fundamental components: catechism, missions, associationism. Nevertheless, in the richness and multiplicity of the proposals, and in the attempt to innovate them, a certain degree of innovation can be recognised.

With regard to Christian initiation and education, each parish had a strict programme of catechism and extracurricular afternoon activities for children, but also for young people and adults. The diocese of Lille then boasts of using a new method, “which consists of the use of images, examples and also games”;⁵⁹ Lienhart once again, in 1952, speaks of “projections” and, regarding the fact that “catechesis per imagines luce proiectas fuit illustrata”,⁶⁰ receives praise from Rome. Furthermore, for the training of catechists in 1951, the Higher Institute of Religious Education was founded in the diocese of Lille under the patronage of the Catholic University. Compared to the first five-year period, the number of members was, in 1957,⁶¹ more than doubled (from 80 to 170). Examinations in religious education were also scheduled through the Catholic University.

During the summer of 1946 alone, 450 holiday camps in the diocese of Lille had “given spiritual refreshment to 18,000 children and young people” and there were family homes for those with particularly complex family situations.⁶²

In Belgium, the Archconfraternity of the Works of Catechism was in charge of catechism. In 1947, the bishops of Belgium published a new catechism to renew religious instruction in schools,⁶³ which also included body care through sport. Furthermore, there was also the use of “*exhibitiones cinematographicae*” and periodicals.

Another front in catechesis were the free schools. All the *relationes*, both French and Belgian, have countless pages devoted to schools, to the problem of founding new schools, managing them once founded, choosing suitable teaching staff. Since running Christian schools was not easy, the bishops aimed to give them over to religious

⁵⁸ Paris 1947; 1952, no. 100.

⁵⁹ Lille 1947, no. 74.

⁶⁰ Lille 1952, minute.

⁶¹ Lille 1957, no. 91.

⁶² Lille 1947, no. 90.

⁶³ Mechelen-Brussels 1947, no. 90.

orders or to involve Catholic parents more in the management.⁶⁴ They also understood, however, that in order to ensure quality teaching, they had to find ways to adequately pay teachers in Catholic schools of all types and grades.⁶⁵ Cardinal Feltin seemed to have a traditional view, in which Catholic schools were needed to produce more vocations;⁶⁶ for Cardinal Lienhart⁶⁷ and Cardinal Gerlier,⁶⁸ in a more modern perspective, the aim was instead to educate the elites. The CLAP (Certificat libre d'aptitude pédagogique) for primary school teachers was also established in Lille, which included a religious education examination.⁶⁹ For both the associations that worked with children and those that worked with adults, the idea was emerging that coordination was necessary between parishes but also between parishes and the diocese, and that it was necessary for some priests and lay people to take care of this full-time.⁷⁰

As far as the preaching of faith was concerned, the traditional method of missions and periodic spiritual exercises was utilised. However, new solutions were also sought, such as "collaboration with radio, television, cinema (cinématograph)"⁷¹ or they wished to innovate the old solutions: in Lille⁷² a specialised group of diocesan missionaries was created to deal exclusively with this task, but the mission did not end with several days of preaching, as was traditionally the case. Instead, it began with a pre-mission, in which the missionaries made contact with the parish and its associations; then the mission was not preached in the church, but in the places where people lived, from factories, to neighbourhood gardens, to gymnasiums; finally, after the mission, the missionaries nurtured the relationships they had built in the parish and the bonds that had been formed, carrying out a sort of post-mission.

With regard to associationism, the bishops had so many groups of Catholic Action, social action, parish 'animation' that they had to be described in a separate annex to the report. Many traditionalist groups were listed: the Eucharistic Crusade, Marian leagues, the League of Large Families, Congregations of the Blessed Virgin, pi-

⁶⁴ Reims 1947, no. 91.

⁶⁵ Paris 1947, no. 100.

⁶⁶ Paris 1957, no. 91.

⁶⁷ Lille 1947, no. 93.

⁶⁸ Lyon 1947, no. 93.

⁶⁹ Lille 1957, no. 91.

⁷⁰ Paris 1952, no. 100.

⁷¹ Lille 1952, no. 94.

⁷² Lille 1952, no. 75.

ous associations, solemn processions of the Pilgrim Mary,⁷³ Les foyers rayonnants, the Work of Baptism, but also Catholic sports associations. Then there were the Catholic Action and Social Action groups, including Christian trade unions (250 throughout France, for each type of worker), divided into categories and subcategories and always with a male and a female branch.⁷⁴ Even in this area of pastoral work in the dioceses, there were priests who were 'detached' from the parish and dealt solely with associations and trade unions, together with leaders who were exempt from work.⁷⁵ All this frenetic and energetic activism had resulted, according to Liénart, in a decrease of communists and an increase of Christian trade union members.⁷⁶

Changes to traditional liturgical rhythms were also attempted. For example, to favour workers who could not attend Mass in the morning and fulfil the precepts, the experiment, approved by Rome, of celebrating evening Mass was undertaken. In Belgium, the solution did not seem to yield great results,⁷⁷ but the French bishops seem more optimistic: Marmottin gave thanks to the Holy Father for allowing the evening Mass since, for example, in a parish where previously there were only seven women at Mass, there were now 75 people including 20 men.⁷⁸

Each diocese had a Supervisory Council, and priests and teachers at Catholic universities renewed their profession of faith every year through the anti-modernist oath of 1910. However, the bishops also considered it fundamental to oppose social injustices, which they believed favoured communism.⁷⁹ They therefore undertook not only to build new churches, new schools, and new seminaries, but also to build new houses, i.e., more dignified accommodation, since many, especially workers, lived in poor material conditions due to both poverty and cramped living quarters.⁸⁰ Realising that the poverty caused by the war was detrimental, the bishop of Mechelen-Brussels⁸¹ had also raised the salaries of parish priests.

⁷³ Reims 1947, no. 17; Bayeux et Lisieux 1947, no. 75.

⁷⁴ Jeunesse Chrétienne Ouvrière, Jeunesse des milieux indépendants chrétienne, Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne, Jeunesse étudiante Chrétienne, Action Catholique Ouvrière, Action Catholique des milieux indépendants, Mouvement familial rural, Action Catholique des indépendants, Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétien, Confédération Française des professions.

⁷⁵ Lille 1952, no. 98.

⁷⁶ Lille 1952, minute.

⁷⁷ Mechelen-Brussels 1952, no. 71.

⁷⁸ Reims 1957, no. 71.

⁷⁹ Lyon 1947, no. 98.

⁸⁰ Paris 1957, no. 100.

⁸¹ Mechelen-Brussels 1952, no. 45.

Great importance was attached to the training of the laity, in particular Catholic Action and social action militants:

If the subversion of Christianity drives away from the Church the part of the people that is least learned and lowest in the social hierarchy, we can fight against this tendency by giving greater intensity to the Christian life of those who have remained faithful.⁸²

Catholic Action adherents were encouraged to participate in political life, but not in a direct way, that is, by staying outside political alignments and factions.

Finally, not only was it necessary for the laity had to be educated, but also the clergy had to be cared for,⁸³ for whose training the dioceses envisaged very onerous amounts of expenditure.⁸⁴ Priests received traditional training based on the Tridentine model, through seminaries run by the Sulpicians and daily monastic rhythms; once inserted in the ministry, they had to wear the cassock and tonsure, although during the war these customs were relaxed and it was not always easy to convince priests to resume them: however, all bishops claimed that the good practices had been restored, except for the tonsure.⁸⁵ The priest could not go to the theatre or attend secular shows, he could not have a maid under the age of 35-40 years (depending on the diocese).

Nevertheless, even within this traditional training, there were signs of modernity: first of all, *urbanitatem* – which was already present in the congresses of the Alliance des Grands Séminaires at the beginning of the twentieth century – was mentioned in the training of seminarians, “the laws of good manners, hygienic precepts and everything that can optimally educate aspirants to the priesthood”.⁸⁶ Great emphasis was placed on the study of scientific subjects, not just the humanities, and many attended universities⁸⁷ even secular universities.⁸⁸ Worker priests and labour missionaries had specific training.

⁸² Lille 1952, no. 99.

⁸³ The clergy in all dioceses are not sufficient to cover the needs of the faithful: only Liénart in 1947 does not complain about this and considers that it has sufficient personnel.

⁸⁴ The seminar item in the Curie budgets is always the largest item – in Paris in 1956, for example, 146 million francs were spent – together with that for Catholic schools, see Paris 1957, no. 39.

⁸⁵ Lyon 1952, no. 47.

⁸⁶ Reims 1947, nos. 40-43.

⁸⁷ Lyon 1952, no. 40.

⁸⁸ Paris 1947, no. 50.

6 The Solutions Proposed: *Fit experimentum, experimur*

In the *relationes* more daring and radical experimentation can be seen: not just updates and attempts to modernise traditional pastoral practices, but genuinely ‘progressive’ experiments. If Liénart in 1947 speaks for example of the “missionnaires du travail”, in other reports the bishops speak freely about worker priests, even after the 1954 condemnation. But other pastoral proposals also constitute a ‘progressive’ experiment.

6.1 Socio-Religious Research Applied to Pastoral Work

First of all, it strikes the reader that sociological research is applied to pastoral work, probably following the insights of Gabriel Le Bras. This occurs in both French and Belgian contexts: for example, Liénart⁸⁹ in 1952 commissioned the School of Social Studies in Lille a socio-religious investigation to define how many people do or do not attend Sunday Mass. Van Roey does not expressly speak of a socio-religious investigation, but in the 1957 *relatio*, in Latin, he inserts insights in the French language that are rich in quantitative data, probably taken, as is evident from a later passage, from a five-yearly census of religious members entrusted by the assembly of the major superiors of Belgium to the Centre for Socio-Religious Research, an organ of the Interdiocesan Centre.

6.2 The Worker Nuns

Secondly, in the 1940s the Petites Soeurs de Jesus of Little Sister Magdeleine had also begun to operate in some French dioceses,⁹⁰ which divided the Fraternities of its fledgling order into Mission Fraternities, Working Fraternities (Fraternité Ouvrières) and Study and Training Fraternities. The action of the worker nuns was not intended to be confused with that of the militant lay members of Catholic Action: in the first drafts of the Constitutions, Sister Magdeleine expressly says, in fact, not to go to factories or workplaces with a direct aim of apostolate. The worker nuns went there to bear witness to poverty and work, to make themselves similar in their exterior life to their worker brothers, “humbly and silently reflecting among them on all the interi-

⁸⁹ Lille 1952, no. 84.

⁹⁰ Cf. Magdeleine de Jesus, *Contemplative*.

or riches of their contemplative religious life".⁹¹ In 1949, Little Sister Magdeleine presented the second draft of the order's Constitutions to Pope Pius XII hoping to obtain papal approval; among the documents, she presented letters from various bishops who had welcomed the sisters into their diocese, including Cardinal Suhard, who hoped that they would be given canonical recognition, and Cardinal Gerlier who spoke of their "special apostolate".⁹² In France in 1949, the Petites Soeurs had a fraternity in Paris,⁹³ a fraternity of medical and nursing studies in Lyone, a Fraternité des Petites Soeurs Nomades en roulotte in Aix en Provence, in Lourdes. In Damascus, Syria, the motherhouse presented itself as Fraternité Ouvrière. In 1950, Father Caronti, OSB, consultor of the Holy Office, had deemed it necessary to wait longer for the *Decretum Laudis* to be assigned to the fraternity, as the directives of Little Sister Magdeleine "appearing at first sight too new and too bold".⁹⁴ They constituted an experiment and were therefore viewed by Rome with much perplexity, as was the character of the founder, said to have "a somewhat surprising ambivalence";⁹⁵ some perplexity also concerned the type of mission they were going to perform,⁹⁶ but the perplexity about the first aspect was such that the second was almost overshadowed. The sisters recounted their experiences not only in Muslim areas, but also in working-class environments. As early as 1947 they had written *Rapport sur les premières expériences des Petites Soeurs Ouvrières*⁹⁷ recounting the experience of two of them, formerly jocists, in Aix-en-Provence in an electric lamp factory since 1946, of four of them in Marseilles in a factory with 120 workers, and of two other sisters in the countryside of Aix-en-Provence since 1947.⁹⁸ While in 1958 *Rapport sur les Fraternités ouvrières* was produced covering the period from 1946 to 1957,⁹⁹ a sign that in any case this experience was being watched by Rome, which demanded regular reports.

⁹¹ *Lettere relative alle Costituzioni 1944-1957*. Thank for the reference to Saretta Marotta.

⁹² *Seconde Costituzioni delle Piccole Sorelle del 1949*.

⁹³ Paris 1957, no. 3.

⁹⁴ Voto del Padre Consultore Emmanuele Caronti OSB circa il *Decretum Laudis* da dare alle Sorelle.

⁹⁵ Anonymous notes, "Extreme humility on the one hand, extreme pride on the other".

⁹⁶ "Can the church in its prudence give them, without proper experience, final approval, especially since the Institute has to work in such difficult environments?", Voto of father Emmanuel Caronti.

⁹⁷ *Rapport sur les premières expériences des Petites Soeurs Ouvrières*.

⁹⁸ Already in 1948, PS Magdeleine wrote to Mons. Levnaud, archbishop of Algiers, who had only conditionally accepted their form of working apostolate, to reassure him, explaining how well the sisters were received in the factory environment (Lettera di PS Magdeleine a Mons. Levnaud, 30 aprile 1948).

⁹⁹ *Rapporti, relazioni, verbali*.

In the *relations*, Cardinal Feltin puts them among the religious orders, as if they had already been approved by the Holy See, and not among the orders of diocesan authority. Monsignor Delay does the same thing in Marseilles,¹⁰⁰ which adds the Little Brothers of Jesus of Charles de Foucauld to the orders of diocesan authority. Cardinal Gerlier, however, does not mention them.

Monsignor Hanssen, an apostolic visitor to Scandinavia, also reported on the Petites Soeurs, who had a community in Oslo, one in Helsinki, one in Copenhagen and one near the Russian border, in his 1957 report.¹⁰¹ The concerns he expressed would all be interesting, but we will limit ourselves to a few excerpts that seem particularly significant:

Their ideal is to christianise the workers' environment with their testimony and by working in the factories and living among the workers [...] This house can only be distinguished from other workers' houses by its sign. Here the sisters have only one common room, like all workers' houses [...] a dormitory which is far too small and does not meet the canonical requirements [...] The bishop of Helsinki repeatedly invited them to come and live near a mission, where the priests could help them and the sisters themselves could help the priests; but no, they wished to stay on the Russian border, to pray for the conversion of Russia. [...] Monsignor Muller of Stockholm refused to allow these sisters to enter the country for reasons that I can approve of and which also reflect my own opinion:

1. The Petites Soeurs de Jésus are a kind of worker-nuns, for whom the same reservations apply as for worker priests in France.
2. A group of only three nuns can be of no significance for the working class environment of a big city.
3. The very poor, almost exotic, dress of the sisters does not make a good impression on the very civilised working class of Scandinavia. The bishop does not find it appropriate that among Protestants this type of worker passes for the ideal of a Catholic worker [...].

Therefore, while the apostolic visitor and the bishop of Stockholm were very critical of them, because the same criticism and misgivings applied to them as to the worker priests in France, the Bishop of Oslo in his *relatio* wished instead that their constitutions be approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Paris 1952; 1957, no. 3; Marseille 1952, no. 3.

¹⁰¹ Relation on apostolic visit to Denmark by Mons. Hanssen in 1957 (Denmark 1957, 89-157). Thanks for the reference to Daiana Menti.

¹⁰² Oslo 1958.

6.3 The Société des prêtres et des soeurs du Prado, the Société de la Sainte Famille

The reports from Lyon describe the Société du Prado, a community of brothers and sisters who lived in common and without vows, under the rule of the Third Order of Saint Francis. The society was founded by father Chevrier in Lyon, whose beatification process was underway in the 1950s. It was directed by a superior general, Monsignor Ancel, auxiliary bishop of Lyon. Bishop Gerlier explained that the society was booming. Its works included a clerical school and a small seminary to prepare young men for the priesthood. Three bishops and more than 200 priests had already emerged from this school, of whom 20 were missionaries and 20 religious members. The Prado priests – 116 in the diocese of Lyons, 406 in all – then took care of some 15 parishes in the diocese, made up of the poor and workers.

A similar society of women living a communal life without vows, under the rule of Saint Francis, constituted the Soeurs du Prado, 135 at that time in the diocese of Lyon alone, 163 in all.

Gerlier added the Société de la Sainte-Famille, a congregation of diocesan authority of about 15 religious priests, who were responsible for the technical and religious education of workers.

Thus, male and female religious orders that took care of workers flourished in the 1940s and in the 1950s. This should be the subject of future research.

6.4 Missionaries of Work and the Secrétariat national de la mission ouvrière

Bishop Feltin, in 1957, seemed to want to be cautious: there had already been the stance of 1954 and perhaps he glimpsed the condemnation of 1959 on the horizon. He emphasised that, having at heart “the ignorance especially of many workers, to whom some, with loquacious language, preach false doctrines that say that temporal justice must be chosen, rejecting divine charity” he had decided to:

send missionary priests to the workers; we call these priests “missionaries of labour”, rather than worker priests.¹⁰³

He then added that “the pastoral commitment of the Parisian clergy is known to all”, even if at times they have been “more ardent than prudent”. In order to promote the apostolate among the workers and

¹⁰³ Paris 1957, no. 100.

provide the most appropriate means to send missionaries to all regions of France, he explained that in April 1957 he had set up the *Secrétariat national de la mission ouvrière* “so that Christ might be revealed to the workers themselves”. Bishop Marmottin also reflected on the priests who acted more ardently than prudently to find innovative pastoral approaches.¹⁰⁴

6.5 The Mission de France of Pontigny

In the *relationes* there are traces of this experience, one of the best known and most famous examples of ‘French progressivism’; in talking about it, the bishops do not seem to be reticent. For example, they recall the number of seminarians they sent to the Mission de France during the five-year period.¹⁰⁵

Cardinal Gerlier explained in 1947 that in one of his parishes a missionary experiment was carried out in which six priests, three diocesan and three regular,

live a common life and occupy themselves with all their strength in the sacred ministry, and stand out because they try to adapt their apostolate to lead the wandering sheep back, guided by the apostolate mind called Mission de France.¹⁰⁶

The Mission de France,¹⁰⁷ about which its Prelate Cardinal Liénart speaks, is based on an observation: “It seems very difficult to reach the factories if one does not lead the life of their workers”.¹⁰⁸

There is a trace of this in the *relatio* of Bayeux et Lisieux of 1947 because the seminary was established there in 1942 under the authority of the Assembly of French Cardinals and Bishops and Cardinal Suhard. Bishop Picaud hoped at that juncture that the seminary

¹⁰⁴ Reims 1947, no. 76.

¹⁰⁵ Ex. Marseille 1952, no. 41; Lille 1957, nos. 40-43. But other dioceses do not talk about it, although they certainly have priests and seminarians at the Mission (e.g., Paris).

¹⁰⁶ Lyon 1947, no. 100.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Mission de France-Pontigny 1956. Paolo Marella in a letter to Cardinal Adeodato Piazza, Secretary of the Consistorial Sacred Congregation, emphasises how the work was so close to Cardinal Liénart, who would be in Rome from 12 to 22 March 1956 and, as ordinary of the prelate and as President of the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops, would want to confer with him on it (letter in Mission de France-Pontigny 1956). The Cardinal’s travel programme included various meetings to talk about the prelate, from the Holy Father to the Consistory, the Holy Office and the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries, and even to visit Monsignor Tardini and Monsignor Dall’Acqua at the Secretariat of State.

¹⁰⁸ Mission de France-Pontigny 1956, no. 5.

would soon have its own, specific canonical statute.¹⁰⁹ The following *relatio* states that the seminary was moved to Limousin.¹¹⁰

In order for it to have a permanent home, the Mission was erected as a *prelatura nullius* by apostolic letter on 23 October 1954 and Cardinal Liénart became its Ordinary on 15 December 1954, after it had been created by Pius XII with the Apostolic Constitution *Omni-um Ecclesiarum* on 15 August 1954; it was located in Pontigny, a famous old Cistercian monastery.

The Mission had originated on 24 July 1941 when the Assembly of Cardinals and Bishops of France had established the seminary of Lisieux in which to educate clerics and young priests deemed suitable for exercising the ministry in regions where the faith was not widely practised.

The houses of the Mission de France in 1957 were grouped into 13 regional congregations led by an elected regional delegate; each regional congregation had several houses whose priests exercised various charismas of the apostolate.

In particular, they cared for workers living among them, the poorest people, immigrants, the psychiatrically ill at the Salpêtrière in Paris, children and adults abandoned by public care, researchers and scientists who had lost faith (in this case, they were priests learned in atomic science and electronic physics), wealthy landowners who were in danger of forgetting the status of farm workers, and unbaptised adults; Cardinal Liénart emphasised that these priests supported militant Christians from getting to those people that Catholic Action and parish works could not reach, fought Marxism by making the Church feel close, fought for social justice, offered religious sociology help to parish priests. They organised missions to workers in factories. They preached through the radio. They were paving the way for the workers' mission that was opening up in Limousine, where Marxism had penetrated so far into the population that it had taken 75% of the vote in the most recent elections.

The Vicar General answered all questions that the bishops put to him and in one year he had already spoken to 30 of the 36 dioceses concerned. The main difficulties highlighted in the meetings were the need to restore peace in houses where, in previous years, there had been ruptures, and then the fact that the Mission de France was not able to send as many priests as the bishops asked for. In addition, according to Monsignor Liénart, many bishops did not fully understand what the charism/task of the Mission priests was. Thus, they expected them to take care of whatever needs the dioceses had.

The Vicar General was Father J. Vinatier, who visited the communities and took care of the priests as well as relations with the bishops.

¹⁰⁹ Bayeux et Lisieux 1947, no. 1.

¹¹⁰ Bayeux et Lisieux 1952, no. 40.

The problem for the priests of the Mission, according to the Bishop of Lille, was that, like many young priests, they were often overworked, so that their nervous system suffered.

Liénart emphasised that none of the priests of the prelature was caught up in modernism or theosophism; a few, but very few, came close to Marxism. The Mission provided for this danger by sending those priests to a less dangerous ministry, when necessary, often convening the teams to talk about the theoretical errors of Marxism and the social doctrine of the church and allowing those priests to cease ministry in order to devote themselves to reflection and prayer for a time. After 12 months of prelacy, Liénart was satisfied because there were many signs of internal renewal and external expansion, which boded well for further progress. The confidence of the French bishops and priests in the Mission grew.¹¹¹

6.6 The Worker Priests

Cardinal Gerlier in 1952¹¹² explains that there exists an experiment in three parishes in communal and missionary life in which the priest works as a factory worker, lives in the presbytery, and performs his priestly ministry on Sundays. Three other such priests live together although they are disconnected/separated from the priests of the parish. He says he is hopeful that the dangers of this form of apostolate will be overcome and that this experiment, which he considers necessary and on which he focuses his attention and courage with great love, will bear much spiritual fruit in the future.

In 1957, i.e., after the project had been discontinued in 1954, Cardinal Liénart speaks¹¹³ of four priests, two in Dunkirk and two in Robiaci, working in the *Mission Operariorum*: they have subsidiary devotion to the bishop and live in fraternal communion with the clergy of that city.

He then launches into an all-out defence of the two worker priests in Dunkirk, one an electrician and the other a driver at the port. He emphasises that this missionary action in Dunkirk is in the planning stage, and ever since it has been led by the two worker priests, there has been diligent participation from collaborating priests from the parishes, militant youth and adults, Catholic Action chaplains, and the various Opera, whereas before only a few young people from JOC and a few militant married couples took part. These individuals said they were incapable of evangelising to fellow workers. “That is why”,

¹¹¹ Mission de France-Pontigny 1956, synthetic judgement.

¹¹² Marseille 1952, no. 100.

¹¹³ Lille 1957, no. 100.

says the bishop, assuming all responsibility, “we prayed that worker priests would join this apostolate”. Liénart’s reasoning is simple: “when the church establishes a mission among the pagans, it sends priests and not lay people”. The beneficial effect of the worker priests infected the laity and also the priests of the Dunkirk parishes, among whom the apostolic impulse was renewed, as the worker priests spoke to the priests of Dunkirk about the spiritual needs of the workers.

Although the priests took care of the workers before, they did not make much effort [...]. Now all the priests of Dunkirk have again been caught up in a serious concern for the cause of the Gospel, which they try to preach together with the lay militants and the worker priests with new hope. Let us add that these priests are very good priests; they faithfully fulfil all their priestly duties, in the course of time they nourish their spiritual life with pious exercises, they spend their free time in such a way as to live united with God, nor do they avoid conversing and talking about religion with their fellow workers, with those comrades who never go to church.

The bishop seems to respond in this way to many of the objections that were made to the experience of the worker priests (accusations of neglecting one’s priestly duties, of neglecting prayer, of converting to Marxism instead of converting to the Gospel). He added that he also hoped that such missions would soon be set up in the towns of Roubaix and Hellemmes, where there are worker priests, but they are still far removed from the context. In the reply minute, the words “He is pleased with the work of two worker priests; one is a motorist at the port, the other an electrician. He says they do a lot of good” are underlined in red and alongside, the minute-taker added: “is it appropriate to mention anything?”. In the response, however, the subject of “worker priests” is not touched upon. It is only recommended that those with an ecclesiastical vocation be protected “a saeculi contagio”.

Even though these were difficult years for the experience of the working priests, Bishop Vion does not hesitate to speak of the fact that his clergy fervently wish to live a communal life and that they are experimenting with this modality in seven districts of the diocese.¹¹⁴

7 Conclusions

This article illustrates some of the aspects that Bishop Modrego y Casaúsand other observers from outside France probably defined as *progressismus gallicus*: it looked in the *relationes* for traces of how

¹¹⁴ Poitiers 1957, no. 47.

the French and Belgian Church, attempted to innovate the traditional pastoral approach after 1945, with modifications or 'experiments' in various areas of pastoral care. And it searched for traces of how the Church of Pius XII looked at these experiments with doubts and fears, but perhaps also with some hope, given the indulgence employed in the responses.¹¹⁵

The *relations* also say something about liturgical aspects, on which it has not been possible to dwell here. They are of no help, however, with regard to the theological impact of the proposed innovations: the *nouvelle théologie* had in fact become a fundamental question for the Holy See in those years, but the questionnaire of 1918, on which the *relations* were based, did not include specific questions on theology.

Furthermore, there are topics that are touched on to a lesser degree than perhaps expected, or not at all. For example, there is no trace of the Mission de Paris, which profoundly influenced the life of the Paris diocese at least from 1943 to 1954. The report of Cardinal Suhard is silent on these and other ferments; until the end, moreover, he seems to have the aim of reassuring the recipient by showing that everything in the diocese is proceeding normally, while it only opens up to a more sincere analysis of the difficulties in the final free considerations. Some bishops, then, are more cautious than others, who instead use the *relations* to plead their own cause in Rome in a more or less veiled way (openly defending the worker priests even after 1954, praising the pastoral experiments, or simply asking Rome for an openness towards issues that had often been made their own by the working class priests themselves, such as the change of the prescribed norms for participation in the Eucharist).

In conclusion, the *relations* are an interesting and rich source for a detailed description of 'Gallic progressivism'; clearly, by somehow enclosing the bishops' answers inside 'cage' of the questionnaire, they show us only a part of the reality of the French and Belgian dioceses, and only the part which the bishops themselves wanted to make known in Rome. However, they show us the awareness that these bishops had of being an advanced church, at the forefront of some problems posed by modernity: a proud Church of France, which negotiated with Rome concerning the institutionalisation of its charismatic/innovative experiences, and did so with prudence, but also without awe.

¹¹⁵ The research does not elaborate on how Rome received the *relations*, a subject on which further investigation would be carried out. For some reflections on the question, however, please refer to the introduction of this monographic issue.

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A Mirroring Effect. Themes and Problems from *relationes ad limina* for a Profile of the Italian Episcopate after World War II

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Abstract The Italian bishops in their *relationes*, on the one hand, seem to perceive the first signs of changes in a society emerging from the Second World War, on the other hand, they seem to remain within established mental frameworks. The link between the Italian bishops and the Roman Curia appears to be decisive: the questionnaire prepared by the Consistorial Congregation and the responses of the Italian bishops seem to speak the same language, controlled and controller correspond to each other but without being real instruments of verification, they seem to be reflected in a mirror without reality intervening to undermine the analysis criteria firmly acquired.

Keywords Italian Catholic Church. Italian episcopate. Roman Curia. Consistorial Congregation. *Relationes ad limina*. Pius XII.



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Given the large number of Italian dioceses, the premise for this essay is the consideration that it is necessarily a kind of coring, which can have the sole objective of highlighting what may be the main issues emerging from all the reports of the Italian bishops to the Holy See.¹

The can. 340 of the Codex Juris Canonici of 1917, paragraph 2, established the precise calendar based on which the *relationes ad limina* were to be sent to Rome by the various ecclesiastical regions: the five-year period was calculated starting from 1 February 1911 and the *relationes* of the Italian bishops, Corsica, Malta and the smaller islands of the Mediterranean bordering the Italian peninsula had to be the first ones to be received.² This means that, for the period examined here, the *relationes* had to be sent by the Italian bishops in the years 1946, 1951 and 1956.

But this paragraph of the Codex Juris Canonici also says something else, more significant if not surprising: the role played by the Italian episcopate in this function of ‘government reporting’ is preeminent to such an extent that the framework offered by the Italian *relationes* can distort the image of catholicity. It is a kind of ‘mirroring effect’, where the controller and controlled one, by continuously looking at each other, end up finding themselves identical, because they speak the same language, express the same cultural and religious background, and have lived similar experiences.

The five dioceses examined here are Agrigento, Città della Pieve, Mantua, Turin and Venice.³ The criteria used in identifying the sample for this survey were on the one hand continuity over time, that is to say, the presence of a complete series of *relationes* (1946, 1951, 1956), on the other hand, a geographical diversification (north, centre, south) and typological episcopal see, which often corresponds to a diversity of episcopal career. The case of Agrigento is interesting because the author of the three *relationes* is always the same bishop, the Passionist Giovanni Battista Peruzzo.⁴ In the case of Città della

¹ An overall look at the main historiographical issues relating to the post-World War II Italian Church is offered by Battelli, “La recente storiografia”.

² See also the decree “A remotissima Ecclesiae” of 31 December 1909 of the Consistorial Congregation.

³ The Italian *relationes ad limina* for the decade 1946-56 are 280, just under 30% of the entire Catholic episcopate, while those taken into consideration here are less than 2%. It is worth underlining that the instructions for the bishops provided for completing the questionnaire in full only on the occasion of the first *relation*. Starting from the second, it was possible to omit to provide information to those questions for which no changes had occurred in the meantime.

⁴ Molare (AL), 1878-Le Rocche di Molare, 1963. Former auxiliary of Mantua (1924) and bishop of Oppido Mamertina (1928), he had been appointed bishop of Agrigento in 1932 and in 1952 he would receive the title of archbishop *ad personam*; author also of the two other previous *relationes*, in November 1961, he will be called by Pope John XXIII to be part of the Theological Commission of the Council, where, according to Henri de

Pieve, instead, the reports are only two (1946 and 1956), by two different authors: Giuseppe Angelucci,⁵ who at the time of writing the *relatio* was 78 years old, and Ezio Barbieri,⁶ who wrote the *relatio* at the age of 59. It should be noticed that for the Consistorial Congregation this diocese is “one of the most invaded by communism”.⁷ The documentation of the diocese of Mantua presents a similar history: the first two *relationes* are written by Agostino Domenico Menna,⁸ who in the second post-war period was criticised for his ambiguous favourable attitude towards fascism. This criticism was known to the Holy See because the secretary of the Consistorial Congregation, who drafted the minute for the answer, felt the need to clarify the position of the ordinary in an accompanying note:

Before the war there were some reservations about the diocesan regime of Msgr. Menna, because it seemed that the bishop had expressed himself, both orally and in a written form, openly in favour of the past regime. During the war, however, he deserved better, thanks to his assistance to the clergy, especially those persecuted by the Germans, to the favour accorded to the works of Catholic Action, to the promotion of religious assistance.⁹

The third *relatio* is written by Antonio Poma,¹⁰ a bishop destined to become an important figure in the post-conciliar Italian episcopate.

Lubac, he signalled himself at least on one occasion for a “ridiculous” and “pathetic” intervention (see de Lubac, *Quaderni del Concilio*, 67; see also Lombino, *Il console di Dio*). In Agrigento there are four files, because the file of the 1951 report contains only the justification for the failure to send the report due to the illness of the mother of the Auxiliary Bishop Giovanni Maria Jacono; it follows a time lag for which the report that was to be sent in 1951 will be dated 1953 and the subsequent 1958.

⁵ Genazzano, 1868-Città della Pieve, 1949. Bishop of Città della Pieve since 1910, a marginal figure of the Italian episcopate, he is among the signatories of the telegram addressed to Mussolini by Giulio de’ Rossi dell’Arno in the name of the “Episcopate and Clergy of autarchic battles” following the declaration of war on 10 June 1940. See Zanini, “Rivendicazioni nazionali-cattoliche”. See also Monticone, *Cattolici e fascisti in Umbria*.

⁶ Buti (PI), 1887-Città della Pieve, 1992. Auxiliary bishop of Pisa in 1945 and bishop of Città della Pieve from 1949 to 1977.

⁷ Città della Pieve 1956, [c. 59]. Unless otherwise specified, all the translations are by the Author.

⁸ Chiari (BS), 1875-Camaldolese hermitage of Gussago (BS), 1957. Bishop of Mantua since 1928, he was a figure that, in the absence of recent studies, remains ambiguous towards the fascist regime. See Cavazzoli, *Guerra e Resistenza*; see also the judgement of Ferrari, Manzoli, Martelli, “Fonti per una storia”.

⁹ Mantua 1946, 5.

¹⁰ Villanterio (PV), 1910-Bologna, 1985. Auxiliary bishop of Mantua since 1951, bishop since 1954, the year in which Menna will be warmly invited to resign; since 1967 coadjutor archbishop of Bologna, ordinary since 1968 after the resignation of Giacomo Lercaro; in 1969 he will enter the Sacred College and will be appointed president of the Italian Episcopal Conference. See Volta, Siliberti, Caporello, *Cardinale Antonio Poma*.

As for Città della Pieve, as well as for Mantua, the secretary of the Consistorial Congregation underlines the evident presence of communism: “it is not a diocese of great faith: communism has many followers”, “the clergy is insufficient, vocations are scarce, the people are very communist”.¹¹

In Turin, one of the major industrial cities in Italy, Cardinal Maurilio Fossati¹² was bishop since 1930. After World War II, he sent only one *relatio* to the Consistorial, in 1951. Finally, the case of Venice has interesting characteristics, because the *relationes* are drawn up by three different bishops: Adeodato Giovanni Piazza,¹³ who in 1948 would be called to Rome as general secretary of the Consistorial Congregation and president of the episcopal commission for the Italian Catholic Action, Carlo Agostini¹⁴ and Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli,¹⁵ who writes his first *relatio* at the age of 75.¹⁶

The comparison between the *relationes ad limina* sent in a certain period of time to the Consistorial Congregation by territorially homologous dioceses can offer, first of all, the occasion for a reflection on the serial data presented here in a synoptic framework, which is otherwise only available with more difficulty: the number of priests and their relationship to the size of the population, the number of seminarians and ordinations, the distribution of parishes in the diocesan territory and their increase, the presence of religious, the commitment of the laity, especially organised, through the number of members Catholic Action and other Catholic organisations, social

¹¹ Mantua 1946, 5; 1951, 30.

¹² Arona (NO), 1876-Turin, 1965, bishop of Galtelli-Nuoro from 1924 and archbishop of Sassari from 1929. He was created cardinal by Pius XI in 1933. See Guasco, “Fossati Maurilio”. I’m grateful to Don Alessandro Giraudo and Don Prof. Antonio Nigra for his availability for consultation of the *relatio* conserved in the Archiepiscopal Archive of Turin.

¹³ Vigo di Cadore (BL), 1884-Rome, 1957. Of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, he was patriarch of Venice since 1935, coming from the diocese of Benevento of which he had been appointed bishop in 1930, created cardinal in 1937, in 1948 he would have been called to Rome to the Consistorial Congregation as general secretary. See Caprioli, “Bio-bibliografia sul cardinale”.

¹⁴ San Martino di Lupari (PD), 1888-Venice, 1952. Former bishop of Padua in 1932. See Niero, *I patriarchi di Venezia*.

¹⁵ Sotto il Monte (BG), 1881-Rome, 1963. Official bishop in Bulgaria in 1925 (later apostolic delegate in 1931), apostolic delegate to Turkey and Greece in 1934, then apostolic nuncio to France in 1944, he was nominated patriarch of Venice and elevated to the cardinal purple in 1953; he will be elected Pope in 1958. Considering the extensive literature on Pope John XXIII, we mention here only Galavotti, “Pace e Vangelo”.

¹⁶ In the accompanying letter, Patriarch Roncalli will allude, not without irony, to the fact: “I am particularly pleased to send your Eminence this first (which will be, without illusions on my part, even the only one) Report on the state of the diocese of Venice”, an allusion which, however, seems not to have been understood by the secretary of the Consistorial which notes the passage with a question mark. See Venice 1956, 78.

transformations through the number of mixed marriages, “concubitates”, but also cinemas, theatrical performances. A further interesting perspective, which however requires specific skills, can be offered by financial statements and economic reports. To give just one example: in the pastoral context, the lack of priests in relation to the overwhelming demographic growth and urbanisation of the Italian population, combined with the need to increase the capillarity of the ecclesial presence through parishes is one of the most recurrent topics that affect the whole of Italy. On this point, the most effective synthesis, which frames the problem within a traditional conception, appears to be the one offered by Patriarch Roncalli, who wrote in his accompanying letter: “to have more priestly vocations to save more souls and to better ensure the triumph of love and the kingdom of Christ the Savior”, which seems to recall Pius XII’s words in *Mystici Corporis*, although with Roncalli’s personal style, “priests and religious both men and women, who have been called to the service of God, and who, at home and in the foreign missions, are protecting, increasing, and advancing the Kingdom of the Divine Redeemer”.¹⁷

The *relationes* were written in the context of a country that had just come out of World War II: all the dioceses in 1946 had to intervene in the reconstruction of buildings, especially churches, even though specific issues manifested themselves depending on how the conflict had taken place. For example, in Agrigento “public morals were compromised mainly by the Anglo-American invasion”,¹⁸ in the same way in Mantua “the morale of the people has deteriorated [...] due to the frequent passage of foreign troops”. Here, however, also the example of virtue and piety brought by Catholic foreign soldiers was mentioned.¹⁹

The case of Mantua offers the starting point for considerations regarding the relationship between the Catholic Church and the liberation struggle.²⁰ In the 1946 report, Msgr. Menna used his answer to question 52 (“whether there are among the clergy those who read unseemly books, periodicals or newspapers with scandal; who unduly meddle in political and administrative life; who have been reduced to the lay state”) as an opportunity to provide a long and detailed list of those Mantuan priests who “had relations with the Italian liberation forces called ‘partisans’ during the war”: some had to flee to Switzerland or, when captured, ended up in Dachau or in the prisons of Verona and Mantua or were forced to house arrest in the bishop’s

¹⁷ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, no. 101.

¹⁸ Agrigento 1946, no. 46.

¹⁹ Mantua 1946, no. 84.

²⁰ On the theme of the relationship between the Italian Catholic Church and the liberation struggle, Giovanni Miccoli’s reflections remain penetrating: Miccoli, “Chiesa, partito cattolico, società civile”.

palace awaiting trial. The list also includes Don Eugenio Leoni, who was hanged by the SS outside the 'Predella' gate on Sunday 12 September 1943.²¹ It should be noticed that the Mantuan bishop, in reporting the biographical data of his priests, never felt the need or the opportunity to say anything about the reasons that led them to choose the side of partisans.

Above all, the war seems to have weakened the 'defensive barrier' against the 'real danger', which always remains communism.²² According to the interpretation of the events given by the bishops, the war caused destructions that seemed to favour communist subversion: "War, famine, lack of work, the spread of communist ideas and other reasons have caused so much depression in the spiritual and moral life that our mind is afflicted with many worries";²³ "The last war and communism have corrupted the customs of the people. Faith, religion, honesty, integrity of life, justice, piety have received serious damage";²⁴ "People are generally kept religious, but there is a great danger for the integrity of the Catholic faith, especially among peasants and workers, not a few of them adhere to socialism and communism, guided by ignorance and deceived by promises";²⁵ "The causes of moral laxity are to be found in the serious economic crisis of our time, which allows communists to deny divine providence and civil order by promoting class struggle and hatred of the Church, which alone can prevent them from succeeding".²⁶

The anti-communist sentiment in the *relationes* of the decade 1946-56 is the most consistent feature and is inserted in different numbers of the questionnaire: from question 16 (on errors against faith) to the entire 11th chapter "De populo fidei", from the question on the modality and frequency of the administration of confirmation (28)²⁷ to that of mixed marriages (32). Communism "undermines the religious foundations",²⁸ and "has a greater responsibility in de-Christianising the Christian people";²⁹ "it spreads among the faithful and has become so strong in the minds of many that they become blind and deaf",³⁰ "due to the strong presence of communism,

²¹ Mantua 1946, no. 52.

²² See Chenaux, *L'ultima eresia*.

²³ Agrigento 1946, no. 86.

²⁴ Città della Pieve 1956, no. 84.

²⁵ Venice 1947, no. 100.

²⁶ Turin 1951, no. 100.

²⁷ The question is that of the inscription at the Communist Party of the godparents.

²⁸ Agrigento 1946, no. 16.

²⁹ Agrigento 1958, no. 84.

³⁰ Città della Pieve 1956, nos. 16-20.

religious life in many places is relaxed”;³¹ “the faithful easily follow the Communist and Socialist parties being persuaded by them that the solution to the economic problem and the comfortable life can come the so-called ‘Material well-being’”.³²

In the industrial city of Turin “the communists are admired for their activity and enthusiasm, they benefit from many aids and initiatives and in fact they dominate [the social activities] by their energy”;³³ in Venice, communism “is particularly concerned with the conditions of the people and the working class, but it discredits faith and religious life”³⁴ and “many workers and peasants, to whom some pseudo-intellectuals add, join these parties”.³⁵

However, this criticism doesn’t go beyond signalling a danger and no solutions are offered, perhaps because the *relatio* is not the most suitable means, perhaps because they are taken for granted. At the same time, the reduction of the concept of ‘communism’ to include everything that does not correspond to one’s own mental schema, in fact to everything extraneous and external to the ecclesiastical institution, seems to reflect the difficulty in reading the transformations that are taking place on the social level in post-World War II Italian society. The episcopate seems to prefer instead to recognise the affinity of present situation with events of the more or less recent past: thus the difficulties encountered by Msgr. Menna in Mantua in 1946 are due to the fact that this land “gave rise and growth to men resentful of religion such as [Roberto] Ardigò, Enrico Ferri, [Enrico] Dugoni and others similar”; in Agrigento, however, “the danger of socialism is increasing, due to the poverty in which the people find themselves, the nature of the work in the mines and the tradition that derives from the time of the Hon. De Felice”.³⁶

After the Second World War, the perception of a rift fracture between the city and the countryside, between industrial workers and the peasant world – which for at least a century seemed to have become the guiding criterion for the presence of the Catholic Church in contemporary society –, seems to find confirmation also in the reports: the Catholic Church proposes to offer a criterion for reading

³¹ Città della Pieve 1946, no. 100.

³² Mantua 1956, no. 100.

³³ Turin 1951, no. 98.

³⁴ Venice 1951, no. 16.

³⁵ Venice 1956, no. 98.

³⁶ On Giuseppe De Felice, the founder in 1891 of the Catania workers’ group, see Biscione, “De Felice Giuffrida, Giuseppe”; on Enrico Ferri and Enrico Dugoni, the protagonists of Mantua socialism between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, see Cavazzoli, Salvadori, *Storia della cooperazione mantovana*; on Roberto Ardigò, philosopher, the highest representative of Italian positivism, see Bortone, s.v. “Ardigò, Roberto”.

social, economic and cultural issues capable of holding together the rural world and the city bourgeoisie. This emerges, for example, from the differences in sacramental practice that the pastoral visits to the diocese and the reports of the parish priests highlighted: “in general, mass on holidays is attended more in the countryside, less in the city. [...] In the countryside, extreme unction is rarely rejected; in the city, however, is easier that the priest is not called by relatives so as not to frighten the sick”.³⁷ In Turin, it is also observed that civil funerals are more numerous for workers, who are members of the communist party. According to the Patriarch of Venice Agostini “outside the city people are more religious, as in every part of the world”,³⁸ while Roncalli observed that 65% of adults attend mass in rural areas, whereas only 40% or even less do so in the city.³⁹ This observation by Patriarch Roncalli illuminates a topic which is taken up by all the bishops, namely the generational and the gender issue: children and women are assiduous in their attendance, and to a lesser extent young men and women, adults are more often absent.

The practical consequences of these privileged relations between the Church and certain sectors of society are also reflected in the success of the promotion of priestly vocations: “for the diocese of Venice, the resources and aid from the parishes of the countryside are necessary, since the parishes of the cities are just self-sufficient. [...] And in fact, most of those who happen to be called by the Lord come from the countryside”.⁴⁰

The fracture also reveals a principle of emancipation on the ethical level on the part of the city bourgeoisie: if the bishop of Agrigento remained more general, observing that “the inner cities are still immune, but wherever the so-called civilisation arrives, evil prevails”,⁴¹ almost all the other bishops specifically identified in ‘onanism’ (i.e., birth control) the generically most deplorable “vice [...] especially in the city”.⁴² Carlo Agostini was the only one to try to understand the reasons, identifying them in the “high rent of the houses”, which for many exceeded the annual income. Taking up these considerations, his successor Angelo Roncalli noted, without passing any form of judgment, the novelty of the recourse to the Ogino-Knaus contraceptive method.⁴³

Roncalli himself seems to propose the only serious attempt to understand the transformations on the anthropological level, while re-

³⁷ Turin 1951, no. 86.

³⁸ Venice 1951, no. 84.

³⁹ Venice 1956, no. 86.

⁴⁰ Venice 1956, no. 100.

⁴¹ Agrigento 1958, no. 84.

⁴² Venice 1951, no. 87.

⁴³ Venice 1956, no. 87.

maintaining, however, within a framework that reflects the traditional uncompromising thought: “among the moral aberrations, what they call human sense or ‘humanism’ should be condemned without indulgence” which “spreads more and more”; morality, left to the individual’s conscience alone, is weakened because evil is not deplored but considered “a purely natural and necessary act, such as eating and drinking, and accepting it is not only an act of compassion but also entirely justifiable, until society suffers direct and immediate damage”.⁴⁴

The different attitudes towards customs and morality, which were already present in the relationship between Catholic Church and fascism, emerge also after 1945 and express a hierarchical and conservative paternalism, which insists on ecclesiastical privileges and is fearful of the turmoil and expectations emerging in the country: dancing⁴⁵ and Sunday entertainment, sport and, above all, the cinema, a true propaganda tool for freedom that has become the major diversion and which requires a particular ecclesiastical intervention through the proliferation of parish cinemas, and of notices posted on the doors of the churches with indications on “honest” and “dishonest” films. “What remedies should be applied?”, asked Fossati, and stated laconically “after the huge war we hoped that the people would repent: but on the contrary...”.⁴⁶

In a context which was still Christian in character and exhibited as such through the reassuring reporting of baptisms, religious marriages, and administration of sacraments, where civil rites such as cremations and lay funerals were present only episodically, the tools that the bishops identified for the intervention of the Church were those of mass mobilisation: the Missions of Fr. Riccardo Lombardi⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Venice 1956, no. 16.

⁴⁵ On this aspect, the repertoire is very wide: in Mantua “often the same mothers accompany their daughters to dances so that they can marry them on this occasion” (1946, no. 92) here the female religious orders “take care that adolescents are instructed in Christian doctrine and led to the Christian life; but they experience not a few difficulties because of dancing, entertainment, shows and other similar things” (1956, no. 91). In Turin “the catechesis of children goes well; but for adults it seems to be more difficult to impart it: sports, cinemas, excursions and dances, especially in the afternoon, distract the faithful” (1951, no. 74); the patriarch of Venice, in 1951, informs that in the ecclesiastical region “with regard to cinematography, it was established by the Bishops’ Conference to set up an interdiocesan cinematographic centre and an inspection commission in Padua” (1951, no. 100). The initiative to establish a “Diocesan cinematographic centre” was also taken in Mantua (1956, no. 96). On the approach to cinema by the Catholic Church of Pius XII, see della Maggiore, “Guerra alla guerra”.

⁴⁶ Turin 1951, no. 84.

⁴⁷ In Mantua “during the month of June 1948 almost thirty thousand men for a whole week gathered in the city squares to listen to [his] excellent sermons” (1951, no. 84), those of the ‘Crusade of goodness’ anticipating the ‘Mission for a better world’ promoted on the recommendation of Pius XII.

and that of the “Pro Civitate Christiana” of Don Giovanni Rossi,⁴⁸ the Marian pilgrimages⁴⁹ and devotions, above all for the jubilee of the Holy Year and for the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary Virgin. Furthermore, they stressed the necessity of intensive catechetical instruction, which was mostly entrusted to associations of lay people who were strictly controlled by the hierarchy – even here the laity was ultimately assigned a subordinate role.⁵⁰ The same is true for the new associations that were created to cope with the changing conditions of the world of work, from ACLI (Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani) to ONARMO (Opera Nazionale di Assistenza Religiosa e Morale degli Operai) to CISL (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori): the reports shall ensure their full functioning to the extent that they are placed under the control of the hierarchy. Precisely the case of the “free trade union” of the CISL indicated some flaws: “The Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori, which we have formed with our hands, is strong, but it seems to me that secularism is gradually penetrating”.⁵¹ From this point of view, Patriarch Roncalli’s initiative to promote a “Theological School for the Laity” acquired a singular and isolated character.⁵²

At the conclusion of this first rapid overview of the *relationes ad limina* of some Italian dioceses, the question remains about the issues on which the Italian bishops do not report. Obviously, it is not possible here to establish whether this is a voluntary silence or an inability to analyse. First of all, this concerns the absence of any reflection about the twenty-year period of fascism and its implications on the level of institutional relations between the fascist regime and the Catholic hierarchy.⁵³ However, on closer inspection, a sort of regret for the past seems to emerge, for example in Umbria, where the bish-

48 The same report of Mantua also mentioned the activity of 38 missionaries; Patriarch Roncalli recalled the mission of the same “Pro Civitate” in Venice and Mestre in 1955 (Venice 1956, no. 75).

49 In Mantua “the annual city processions of the venerated relics of the Precious Blood of Christ in Parasceve and Corpus Domini and the Blessed Virgin Crowned” (1951, no. 84), in Agrigento “the solemn *Peregrinatio Mariae* as it is called, and various Eucharistic Marian Congresses” (1953, no. 84).

50 The bishop of Città della Pieve reassured that “all members of these associations are docilely subject to the direction and guidance of the ordinary and the Apostolic See” (1956, nos. 94-95); in addition to the Catholic Action, there were “the Confraternities, the Pious Unions, the Associations called ‘Daughters of Mary’, Company of S. Luigi, of S. Agnese” (Mantua 1956, no. 84).

51 Agrigento 1958, no. 94.

52 Venice 1956, no. 75.

53 “Manipulation of history” is the expression used by Daniele Menozzi to explain this self-absolving attitude of the Catholic hierarchy after World War II. See Menozzi, *Chiesa e diritti umani*, 143; see also the conclusions of Ceci, *L’interesse superiore*, 316-22.

op did not fail to underline how “the customs of the people, for which our country was a prosperous country, due to the war and spread of [communism] have declined quite a bit”;⁵⁴ in Venice, on the other hand, Cardinal Piazza warned of the “grave danger against good morals, due to the license induced by a misunderstood freedom, from which the means of perversion multiply and corruption is rampant”.⁵⁵

A second aspect which does not appear in the reports sent to the Consistorial Congregation concerns the frictions and polarisations within the Catholic Church after World War II, all those underground movements that agitate it and that will emerge only during and after the council: the tensions within the organised laity, in particular the delicate matter of the resignation of the leaders of the Youth of Catholic Action,⁵⁶ the ambiguous relationship between Catholic Action and Civic Committees, to which only the Bishop of Mantua Antonio Poma quickly refers to, but only in 1956 – therefore, already in a climate different from the frictions of 1948-53 –, the ideas for renewal in the areas of liturgy,⁵⁷ biblical studies, catechesis, ecumenical dialogue.⁵⁸ The Italian dioceses of the second post-war period as they are presented by their bishops are still monolithic.

The self-critical observations remain on a superficial level: Poma noted that “there is no lack of some [priests] endowed with such a spirit as to question ecclesiastical obedience”, although this seems to include only forms of external transgressions such as smoking, excessive use of motorcycles or cars, reading “secular” newspapers, attending cinemas. Perhaps, some timid reference can be found in places where experiments in the liturgical field are made with the introduction of the “children’s mass” or interventions in places of worship aimed at facilitating the participation of the faithful⁵⁹ or in the field of catechesis.

The *relations*, therefore, seem to describe a situation which, if not fully under the control of the ordinary, is at least substantially

⁵⁴ Città della Pieve 1946, no. 84.

⁵⁵ Venice 1947, no. 100. See Caponi, “Il grave errore del nostro secolo”.

⁵⁶ See Piva, *La gioventù cattolica in cammino*.

⁵⁷ See the summary of Grillo, “Culti e liturgie cristiane”.

⁵⁸ See Zizioulas, “Dalla divisione alla ricerca dell’unità”.

⁵⁹ This is the case of the Basilica of Saint Mark in Venice, characterised by the Byzantine style that provides for the presence of plutei aimed at separating the presbytery and the main altar from the rest of the basilica; on the initiative of Patriarch Roncalli, “supported by strong arguments [...] and with almost universal consent”, a solution of hinges was identified in order to lower the “screens that intertwine with the iconostasis placed at the entrance to the presbytery” in order to allow “the view of the altar of Saint Mark, and consequently of the sacred rites that are performed in the chapel, so that the group of faithful, who are present in the nave, who regret not being able to see anything that happens to the altar, may participate with attention and devotion to the sacred mysteries” (Venice 1956, no. 61; see Niero, “La questione dei plutei”).

compact and free from situations beyond the strength and authority of the bishop: errors against faith, for example, are in fact absent,⁶⁰ for the most part the sanctions are limited to disciplinary violations.

At the same time, the responses of the Consistorial Congregation, mainly aimed at encouraging or, at least, justifying the limits of the governmental action of the bishops, seem to respond to the need to maintain a formal balance in which the controller (the Consistorial Congregation) and the controlled (the bishops),⁶¹ who are appointed by the Roman Curia of which the same controller is a part and who speak a common language, are reflected in a mirroring effect.

In conclusion, the reading of the *relationes ad limina* of the Italian bishops after World War II, albeit limited to a few cases, seems to confirm what Giovanni Miccoli already intuited: the analyses and interpretations of the Italian bishops correspond to models and cultural schemes widely prevalent and settled in the Italian ecclesiastical world.⁶²

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⁶⁰ The reference to Modernism, for example, to deny its presence in the diocese, appears more a homage to the form of the questionnaire than the manifestation of a concrete possibility.

⁶¹ The Consistorial had “personal and complete jurisdiction over the Bishops”, see Dieguez, “Governo della Chiesa e vigilanza”, 586.

⁶² Miccoli, “Chiesa, partito cattolico, società civile”, 377-8.

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Between Repression and Defence The Condition of the Catholic Church in Communist Yugoslavia from *relationes ad limina* (1946-58)

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Abstract In post-World War II Yugoslavia, the issue of relations with the Communist state becomes central to the Catholic episcopate. The defence of the ecclesial presence and the preservation of the faith in the face of the repression carried out with force by the political authorities is a dominant aspect in the *relationes* sent by the bishops to the Holy See. In the complex and articulated Yugoslav reality, where different religious and national identities are intertwined and oppose each other, the bishops note that religious sentiment is still quite alive among the faithful, even in a political-social context dominated by socialist materialism, sustained by the state, and in this, the first instances of a kind of practical materialism also appear.

Keywords Yugoslavia. Communism. Materialism. Anti-religious repression. National identity. Religious practice. *Relationes ad limina*.

Summary 1 The Yugoslavian Contest. – 2 The *relationes*. – 3 The Ways of Repression. – 4 The Clergy. – 5 National Differences and Liturgical Peculiarities. – 6 The People. – 7 Non-Catholics. – 8 Conclusions.



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1 The Yugoslavian Contest

An examination of the condition of the Yugoslav Catholic Church in the immediate post-World War period, as it emerges from the *relazioni* sent by the bishops to Rome, must necessarily take into account the differences and peculiarities of the various dioceses, in the knowledge that the central problem common to all this episcopate is the relationship with the communist state.

The many traits of unevenness that this church presents (so much so that we should almost speak of ‘churches’)¹ are intimately related to the specific reality of Yugoslavia. This is a relatively young state; since its establishment after World War I as a monarchy led by the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty, it is pluriethnic (it was founded as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) and pluriconfessional (we find there primarily Orthodox Christians and Catholics as well as an Islamic component); after the tragic and intricate events, not only of war, related to the Second World War, Yugoslavia is reborn as a socialist state structured as a federation of republics; the leading role of liberation movement assumed by the communist component translates into the precise will to implement Marxist orientations, which overlap with the demands of the different national identities (and perhaps a common ‘Yugoslav’ identity perspective).²

The country’s multiple areas and ethnic groups (only to a certain approximation traceable to the new federated republics)³ present deeply varied religious, linguistic and socio-cultural realities. The overlap between revolutionary action and the affirmation of national identity often carries tragic implications in the imposition of a totalitarian one-party political system; moreover, the definition of the new borders with the Italian state leads to lengthy diplomatic disputes and the sad affair of the exodus of a large part of the Italian-speaking population included within the new Yugoslav borders.⁴ At the same time, Yugoslavia’s oscillating international position after the break with the Soviet Union (1948) places it in a rather peculiar position in Europe, as a communist but non-aligned country, in many situations supported by the Western bloc.⁵

1 E.g. Mikrut, *La Chiesa cattolica e il comunismo* dedicates separate essays to the various political and national realities of Yugoslavia.

2 Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*; Pirjevec, *Serbi, croati, sloveni*; Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert*.

3 Serbia (with the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo), Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia are federated republics in Yugoslavia.

4 Tenca Montini, *La Jugoslavia e la questione di Trieste*; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*; Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale*.

5 Previšić, *Breaking Down Bipolarity*.

From a religious point of view, Slovenia and Croatia are compactly Catholic; Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Muslims, Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs coexist, has significant Catholic components; Serbia and Montenegro have an Orthodox majority (Catholics are a small minority, but of some size in a few circumscribed areas); Macedonia has an Orthodox majority with a significant Islamic component and a laughable Catholic minority. Superimposed on this is the ethnic issue: Croats and Serbs differ in defining their identity primarily on a religious basis. In the context of ethnic-religious relations, a special case in point is the Skopje diocese, which includes Macedonia (a few parishes and a few thousand baptised) and the autonomous region of Kosovo, dependent on Serbia but with an Albanian and Islamic majority (Catholics here, just over 20,000, are almost all Albanian).⁶

On a more properly ecclesiastical level, trying to summarise at least the most obvious differences between the various dioceses, we can note that five (out of more than twenty) still depend on Congregation De Propaganda Fide.⁷ Moreover, there are dioceses that affect compactly Catholic territories, some in which Catholics are a significant component, others in which Catholics are a small minority; there are dioceses with nearly two million faithful (such as Zagreb) and others with only 30,000 (such as Krk, where, however, they correspond to the total population of the area concerned). The not many Catholics of Byzantine rite (Uniates), mostly in Croatia, are subject to the eparchy of Križevci, but in this study only the Latin-rite dioceses are considered.

In pre-war Yugoslavia, the path to reaching a concordat between state and church had failed.⁸ The heavy wounds of the war, which had seen terrible internal contrasts made even more complex by the Italian and German military presence, had on the one hand compacted the entire anti-fascist front around the communist resistance, but at the same time this had opened the way for painful political purges. The Catholic Church and churchmen – who during the war in many but not all cases had shown closeness for nationalist groups – were soon identified by the new regime as a real enemy.⁹

Yugoslavia's special international position is reflected in the relationship between the state and the church. On the other hand, in a

⁶ Overall, less than 30,000 Catholics out of a population of 1,800,000.

⁷ They are the three Bosnian dioceses (Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka: for simplicity, I will mention them using these designations, although the correct references would be more complex), that of Bar (which includes much of Montenegro) and that of Skopje (Macedonia and Kosovo).

⁸ Salmič, *Al di là di ogni pregiudizio; Mithans, Jugoslovanski konkordat*.

⁹ Roter, *Katoliška cerkev in država v Jugoslaviji*; Akmadža, *Crkva i država*; Morozzo Della Rocca, "La vita cristiana nella Jugoslavia comunista"; Boeckh, "Zur Religionsverfolgung in Jugoslawien"; Čipić Rehar, *Cerkev in oblast na Primorskem*; Krišto, *Katolička crkva u totalitarizmu*.

pluriconfessional context, the regime's attitude toward the Catholic Church – whose bishops answer to the Holy See – ends up being different from that toward the Orthodox Church (which is autocephalous) and the Islamic communities; from this point of view, the regime shows a preference for a kind of national church, which is considered more controllable and more in line with the politico-national project carried out by the regime.¹⁰

2 The *relationes*

Our point of observation is therefore the *relationes ad limina*. It must be said at once that those arriving in Rome from Yugoslavia in the period under consideration (1946-58) are relatively few: they concern less than half of the dioceses and only in part are associated with a Roman presence of the ordinary. The government does not easily allow the bishops to move and leave the state, or does so with criteria of evident discretion; the meshes are gradually opening in the late 1950s. Even the route of sending reports through the Nunciature is not smooth, considering the very likely loss of confidentiality that such communications should have. The gaze of the political police is keen to catch every movement and every document.

In addition, the governance of the dioceses often has precarious features: several sees are governed by apostolic administrators, who must be resorted to for various reasons, from the failure to appoint a new bishop, which would inevitably require a confrontation with the government, to the inability of the ordinary to exercise his jurisdiction because he is in exile or imprisoned.¹¹ The situation tends to unblock in the late 1950s, in parallel with the possibility granted to bishops to carry out the prescribed Roman visitation. This should be read from the overall perspective of Belgrade's diplomatic position.¹²

In examining the *relationes ad limina* of the Yugoslav bishops to the Holy See between the end of the war and the conclusion of Pius XII's pontificate, it should therefore be noted that these documents, from a chronological point of view, lie at the margins of the period considered.

¹⁰ Valente, *L'Ostpolitik della Santa Sede*; Alexander, *Church and State*; Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus*.

¹¹ Moreover, I do not consider in this reconnaissance the affair of the apostolic administrations of the parts of the Italian dioceses (Gorizia and Trieste) included within the Yugoslav borders, which would require a completely special investigation (Vidmar, "Apostolski administratorji slovenskega dela goriške nadškofije"). Also, there are no reports from the former Italian diocese of Poreč-Pula.

¹² Valente, *L'Ostpolitik della Santa Sede*, 54-68.

Six reports are sent between 1946 and 1948, although among them the one sent by Bishop Tomažič of Maribor¹³ Tomažič in 1946 cannot be considered a true *relatio ad limina* since it is a brief – albeit significant – communication on the anti-Catholic repression suffered at the hands of the Nazis in the diocese of Slovenian Styria.¹⁴ These reports usually passed through the Nunciature without the bishops leaving the country (with the exception of the bishop of Rijeka, Camozzo, who managed to make the visit in the late 1946).¹⁵ It's need to remember that the diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and the Holy See were not easy during this period: the Nunciature, without a titular from 1941, was headed by a Regent (Hurley, 1945-1949) and by an *chargé d'affaires* (Oddi, 1949-1952) until 1952 when there was a break in relations.¹⁶

Following the five-year scan of visits, the Yugoslav bishops were to make the visitation in 1948, 1953 and 1958. Skipping the 1953 round, four reports were sent in 1958; these received responses just during the pontificate of John XXIII. Of the four ordinaries drafting them, only Butorac (Dubrovnik) is titular of his own diocese;¹⁷ the others are two apostolic administrators – Garković of Zadar and Držečnik of Maribor – and a coadjutor – Šeper of Zagreb – acting in place of the titular, namely Cardinal Stepinac, under house arrest and unable to exercise his ministry. The latter three would shortly thereafter become bishops of their respective sees. Others would be sent in 1959, but we are outside the Pacellian pontificate.

A separate – but inevitably connected – discussion must be made for the *relationes* of the five dioceses still dependent on Propaganda Fide: as soon as 1958 some bishops are authorised to make the visitation to Rome and thus transmit the relevant report. In the previous decade, however, several communications on the state of the dioceses or the condition of the church in Yugoslavia are sent through

¹³ For simplicity's sake, I indicate Maribor (actual episcopal see) when I mean the diocese which officially has the title of the diocese of Lavant. As a result of complex institutional events the original see (St. Andrä in Lavanttal) has long since ceased to be part of the diocese, but the original title was retained until 1962.

¹⁴ Montanar, *Il vescovo lavantino*; Montanar, *La diocesi di Lavant*.

¹⁵ The report (transmitted in July 1946) is completed in Venice because of obvious censorship problems; in a confidential communication Camozzo asks that all communication go through the patriarchal curia in Venice. Camozzo completes the visit in November of that year, meeting the deadline proper to the Italian episcopate.

¹⁶ For the diplomatic relation between the Holy See and Communist Yugoslavia in this period: Valente, *L'Ostpolitik della Santa Sede*; Gallagher, *Vatican Secret Diplomacy*; Kolar, "Regens nuntiaturae mons. Joseph Patrick Hurley".

¹⁷ With regard to the reports of the Dubrovnik diocese, it should be added that Butorac in 1958 also sent the 1953 report

the Nunciature.¹⁸ These are never, at least for the period under consideration, written reports following the prescribed questionnaire.

3 The Ways of Repression

The relationship with the communist state, which promotes an “atheistic and enemy-of-the-church orientation”,¹⁹ unites all these communications. In the new institutional context, where every aspect of public and private life must be conformed to the materialistic principles of Marxism,²⁰ the church finds itself in an obviously difficult situation, after the attitudes of several churchmen during the war were in many ways controversial or in an antithetic position with respect to the liberation army.

The breadth of the texts of the reports and the much information they contain suggest to us a sincere need for communication, although these are more often than not first reports, in which ordinaries are usually called upon to be precise and detailed. These reports do not appear to be documents drafted simply in response to an obligation. Even within the rigid schema posed by the questionnaire, the impression is that there is an urgent desire on the part of the episcopate to highlight the precarious condition in which their respective dioceses and the Yugoslav Church in general find themselves.

The bishops denounce the repression operated by the state, which “tends to take the faith out of the hearts of the people and to make life impossible for the Ecclesiastical Authority and the Clergy”,²¹ and which is articulated by affecting the ecclesiastical structure and the broader dimension of religious life in a generalised manner.

In connection with the issue of repression, a first aspect is that of the requisition of property, in application of the Yugoslav agrarian law that imposed a limit on private ownership of land; and even ecclesiastical property was considered as such (associated with this is

18 There are quite different situations among these dioceses: the diocese of Sarajevo is in practice without an ordinary because Ordinary Šarić left Bosnia as early as 1946, first for Austria and then for Spain; Banja Luka has no ordinary after Garić's death and the diocese is temporarily entrusted to Bishop Čekada of Skopje, whose actions are strongly hindered by the regime; the elderly Bishop of Bar Dobrečić (who died in 1955) seems to have good relations with the authorities, has good freedom of movement but does not report to Rome, except to defend himself or protest some local situations.

19 Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 16. Camozzo writes his report in Italian language. Unless otherwise stated, all translation are by the Author.

20 “Vitam degimus in republica, cui finis supremus est, omnia in vita privata sociali, oeconomica, politica et culturali imbuendi principiis materialisticis marxismi omnemque formam vitae ad haec principia redigendi. Non statim sed per gradus iste finis ubique in praxim deducitur, consequenter, inexorabiliter, severissime” (Krk 1948, 4).

21 Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 100.

the end of public prebends to the clergy). These measures hit the ecclesiastical structure hard, coming to deprive it of its main sources of livelihood. "The material condition of the clergy and churches is rather precarious", notes Šeper, moreover, "there are few parishes where in-kind supports are practiced", and these are forbidden by the civil power.²² But, writes Srebrnić (Krk) as early as 1948, the faithful (and thus the population), "because of the new economic methods, are in increasing difficulties".²³ A generalised malaise – according to this perspective. The trauma of the war, of which the bishop of Krk recalls the tragic passages and the consequences of the various occupations, seems to affect and amplify negatively in the new conditions.

Add to this the confiscations of buildings, the failure to repair churches and structures (from canonical houses to seminaries) damaged by the war, or the great difficulty of building new churches. An overall new condition, experienced even more painfully by those who, like the last Italian Bishop of Rijeka Camozzo, register with fear the transition from Italian to Yugoslav sovereignty, a transition that entails worsening.

But the main target of repression is the people.

Even leaving in the background iconic figures well known even at the time outside Yugoslav borders, as well as to the Holy See, such as Cardinal Stepinac²⁴ (about whose condition, however, Šeper reports in 1958), it should be noted how clearly evident from the reports is the attack on church personnel, carried out rather heavily through convictions, imprisonments and direct pressure. From this point of view, intimidation through arrest, detention and other forms of control indifferently affect church personnel of different levels, with traits of approximate regularity.

Srebrnić in his *relationes* (which he fills out following the old 150-question questionnaire of 1909) tells of the imprisonment he suffered on April 1945 (first in jail, then under close supervision in a convent) and his return to the diocese as recently as September of the same year.²⁵ Several bishops are affected by measures of imprisonment or restriction of freedom, with different times and modalities, not

²² "Facultas possidendi pro personis moralibus ecclesiasticis coarctata est, nam iuxta legem de reformatione agraria unumquodque ens ecclesiasticus solum usque ad 10 hectaros (17 iugeres) possidere valet. [...] Ideo conditio materialis cleri et ecclesiarum sat precaria est. [...] Paucae sunt hodie paroeciae in quibus praestationes in natura adhuc vigeant. Dura exactio etiam a potestate civili prohibetur" (Zagreb 1958, nos. 4, 10).

²³ "Cum propter novas methodos oeconomicas, quae ipsis in dies plus plusque applicantur, in angustiis semper maioribus versentur" (Krk 1948, 1).

²⁴ Batelja, *Blaženi Alojzije Stepinac – svjedok Evandjelja ljubavi*. Another relevant case is that of the Bishop of Ljubljana Rožman (Griesser Pečar, "Ljubljanski škof dr. Gregorij Rožman").

²⁵ Krk 1948, no. 3.

always made explicit in the *relationes*. Some choose exile, also sensing as a heavy danger the probable retaliation by the new authorities. From this point of view, the bishops are very careful in describing the situation of their clergy, called in this by precise questions, but also with the precise will to denounce individual events to the Holy See.

In fact, when it comes to talking about the clergy and religious congregations, the tones, especially in 1946-48, resemble those of real war bulletins: we find lists of priests arrested or killed. From this point of view between 1946-48 and 1958 there is a certain evolution, in the sense that by the end of the 1950s there are almost a reduction of cases of priests or seminarians under arrest. Thus, always Butorac senses in 1958 almost with amazement the absence of new priests imprisoned.²⁶

Question 17 explicitly asks about freedom of worship: all the bishops touch on different aspects in light of repression and limitations, but generally agree in pointing out the discrepancy between a constitutionally affirmed freedom and a reality made up of repression and limitations on public worship outside the churches. As early as 1946, Camozzo notes how only “apparently freedom of worship is respected” and is “obstructed with the surveillance of the Clergy in Church and outside and with the vigilance of the people attending Church”,²⁷ a situation that cannot be remedied. Butorac warns that “worship is freely practised”,²⁸ but those who attend (especially men or young people) suffer constant persecution. Later, in 1958, Garković summarises, “worship is free, however, limited within the church, as is the number of processions”.²⁹ Without major differences the bishops agree with similar statements. Thus, the picture drawn by Šeper becomes illustrative:

Freedom of worship since 1945 has been restricted in various ways. The exercise of worship is increasingly restricted within the framework of sacred places. E.g. places where processions can be held outside church spaces are rare; in fact, special permission must be sought. However, home blessings can be done anywhere. People who are assigned to teach in public schools are barred from public worship. Similarly, it is rare to see anyone enter the church in military clothing. Teachers and professors usually in secret contract ecclesiastical marriage and baptise their children.³⁰

²⁶ “In carceribus nemo sacerdotum vel theologiae alumnorum amplius reperitur” (Dubrovnik 1958, no. 45).

²⁷ Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 17.

²⁸ Dubrovnik 1948, no. 17.

²⁹ Zadar 1958, no. 17.

³⁰ “Libertas cultus inde ab a. 1945 variis modis coarctatur. Exercitium cultus semper magis intra ambitum locorum sacrorum restringitur. Rara sunt v.g. loca ubi processiones

This is freedom understood in the two possible directions: on the one hand, the exercise of public worship by clergy, and on the other hand, being able to participate in worship, receive the sacraments, and show oneself Catholic. The picture is clear: access to places of worship and ceremonies is constantly under observation by the authorities. But the most serious consequence of this attitude is the obvious retaliation by the state on those who show themselves Catholic; the civil servant cannot do so, risking dismissal. On the other hand, already in this regard, as Šeper himself suggests, there is an adherence to religious practice that may be hidden but is not undone by the work of the regime.

The other concern that the bishops bring out is educational. The steps toward the secularisation of education (not only the exclusion of religious instruction in school definitively since 1952) are concrete and create not a few difficulties, which are answered by constant and laborious catechetical work, opposed by the authorities but which manages to find continuity and a space within parish circles. Practices therefore possible, but to be carried out in limited areas, over which, however, the vigilance of the police apparatuses is felt. Thus, even missions to the people are only in some cases possible (and still with some regularity towards the end of the 1950s).

Other restrictions on religious practice, which are far from minor, concern, for example, the management of cemeteries that are taken away from ecclesiastical authority, the issue of hospice care (the presence of nuns as nursing staff only in some cases is accepted) and also the restriction on freedom of the press. Only few Catholic periodicals have been allowed to be printed, probably because of special conditions related to particular relationships between individual bishops and political authorities. Few people complain that even pastoral letters cannot be printed. Sometimes stratagems are reported, such as in Zagreb, where the diocesan bulletin is not published, but “mechanically multiplied”.³¹ Catholic organisations such as Catholic Action are banned, depriving these dioceses of an instrument that still shows its effectiveness elsewhere.

extra territorium ecclesiasticum ducuntur, nam ad hoc specialis licentia petenda est. Benedictiones tamen domorum fere ubique fieri possunt. Personis quae magisterio in scholis publicis addictae sunt publicum exercitium cultus aperte interdictum est. Similiter raro videbis aliquem veste militari indutum ecclesiam ingredi. Ludimagistri et professores generatim secreto tantum matrimonia ecclesiastica contrahunt et suos liberos baptizandos tradunt” (Zagreb 1958, no. 17).

³¹ Zagreb 1958, 10.

4 The Clergy

Hard hit during the war, often reduced in numbers (in proportion to parishes and the previous situation),³² limited in public action, the Catholic clergy operates and lives in conditions that are certainly not easy. It is nevertheless still a clergy – as presented – respectful of the Holy See, prepared and faithful. The theme of fidelity to the Pope is not rubricable to a routine affirmation in a context in which the regime clearly pushes (especially in the immediate post-war period) for a ‘nationalisation’ of the Church and thus for a more or less sensitive detachment from Rome.

There is no lack of some cases of defection, but they are numerically rather small and circumscribed. If anything, a serious problem is ensuring regular seminary formation, which is permitted by the authorities but hindered in practice. It becomes necessary for smaller dioceses to dispense with their own formation institutes (though active in the recent past), in order to converge on those that have managed to survive at the larger dioceses. Theological faculties (Zagreb and Ljubljana) have been deleted from state universities.

In addition to what has already been mentioned in the previous paragraph, one of the problems most keenly felt by the episcopate is the membership in clergy associations, promoted by the Regime probably with a view to exerting substantial direct control over the clergy and possibly to arrive at an autocephalous situation on the Orthodox model. These kinds of associations, the organisation of which also leads in 1948 to a harsh diplomatic exchange between Rome and Belgrade, are usually led by priests who sympathise with the regime, receiving reprimands from the ordinaries.

Some bishops are particularly harsh and proudly point out that in their own diocese almost no one has joined.³³ Others, while reiterat-

³² The complexity of the Yugoslav reality would make it necessary to evaluate with how much attention was happening between the two wars and what just happened during the war: the relationship that the Church has with the different political regimes that follow one another (both in terms of time and space, even in such a short chronologically span) is by no means marginal.

³³ “Sacerdotum associatio, ab Ecclesia reprobata, nullatenus proficit. Toto hoc quinquennio nemo novus nomen dedit. Qui vero rarissimi initio adhaesere, aliqui etiam vi compulsi, fere nihil agunt ad societatem hanc propagandam, et si quis forsan audet, nihil proficit. In provincia Dalmatiae ecclesiastica minimo sociorum numero gaudent. Adversariorum propositum, ut huius associationis adminiculo nationalis, uti dicitur, ecclesia efformaretur, in cassum abiit neque quid ultra in re, in Domino confidimus, proficient” (Dubrovnik 1958, no. 52). “I sacerdoti, per fortuna pochi, associati nella ‘Associazione professionale del clero’ contro il divieto dell’Ordinario, sono stati sospesi ed i loro ricorsi alla Santa Sede sono stati respinti, ma non tutti si assoggettarono” [...] “Per tutelare la disciplina in questo senso, ed in altro ancora, l’Ordinario ha comminato la scomunica a chi si assenta illegittimamente dall’Arcidiocesi, dappoichè non si osservava la sospensione. Tre sacerdoti sono decaduti avendo contratto il cosiddetto

ing the ban, have a more pragmatic attitude, trying if not exactly to justify, at least to understand the (often very concrete) reasons behind such a choice:

Those [priests] who refuse due reverence and obedience are those who join the 'Professional Associations of Priests', which are promoted by the state but prohibited by the episcopate. In our archdiocese there are about 60 of them (about 12 percent). Most of these have joined either out of compulsion or material interest (social welfare, pension). However verbally almost all have shown loyalty to their superiors.³⁴

These are, however, at least in the dioceses for which we have reports, rather limited accessions.

In contrast, very difficult in this regard is the Bosnian situation, where Franciscans (who had suffered heavy persecution by the communist liberation army during the war, given also the rather close relations with Pavelić's Croat nationalist government) adhere *en masse* on the Provincial's instructions, reaffirming a deep-rooted distrust of secular ordinaries.

Regular clergy is still present, but several houses are being closed. In many cases, these are foreign orders forced to leave the country (and again a political will to nationalise can be glimpsed).

The priests in general, according to what the bishops write, are completely alienated from political issues and are not fascinated by Marxism.³⁵ The few cases of priests close to the regime are removed or excluded themselves. While this kind of documentation may present some suspicions about the real correspondence of statements that in fact put the writer in a good light, the actual data on the circumscribed adherence to regime organisations and the rather widespread willingness to maintain an authentically Catholic dimension-

matrimonio civile" (Zadar 1958, nos. 49-53 [sic!]; original in Italian). For a comparison: Griesser Pečar, "Cirilmetodijsko društvo katoliških duhovnikov"; Kolar, "The Priestly Patriotic Associations".

34 "Iis qui debitam reverentiam et obedientiam denegant accensendi sunt ii qui 'Associationi professionali sacerdotum', a Statu promotae, sed ab Episcopatu prohibitaе, nomen dant. Tales in nostra Archidioecesi numerantur circiter 60 (i.e. 12%). Maxima pars vel metu coacti vel ob interesse materiale (assistencia socialis, pensio) associationi nomen dant. Ore tamen fere omnes fidelitatem erga superiores ecclesiasticos profitentur" (Zagreb 1958, no. 49).

35 "Non habentur sacerdotes, qui in dioecesi immodice et indebite rebus politicis et ractionibus civilibus se immiscerent, neque in nostro clero nunc inveniuntur contentiones et aemulationes propter politicam, linguam vel nationem, quae aptae essent pacem in ipso turbae. Sacerdotes nostri iam tempore occupationis italiace multas pati debebant, uti in Relatione a. 1943 expositum est, at mala graviora eos exspectabant, quando Partisani-communistae territorium Dioecesis obsederunt" (Krak 1948, no. 48).

even in hierarchical respect toward Rome-shows the substantial resilience of this church and church personnel. Defence in the face of repression also passes through this entrenchment.

5 National Differences and Liturgical Peculiarities

The plurality of national groups and the many local peculiarities make the church a rather articulated and inhomogeneous whole. On the other hand, the individual reports necessarily tend to provide descriptions of particular realities from a mostly internal and compartmentalised perspective; usually from the comparison one can grasp the variety. So, some observations by the last Italian bishop of Rijeka, Camozzo, who looks at his diocese, which also includes Croatian and Slovenian territories, still from a substantially Italian point of view, are of some interest. Among other things, in his report, compiled at the crucial moment when the war was officially over but the peace treaties had yet to be signed, a heavy climate of demobilisation was felt. We can easily recognise between the lines his 'Italian-ness' not only in the used language, but also in his feeling toward the national belonging, which leads him to emphasise certain differences between Slovenes and Croats, essentially perceiving them as something different from himself and the city in which he resides. His is a view in which one can feel the legacy if not of fascist Italy, at least of the Italy that ruled here (evidently with rights, according to his point of view) and with whose authorities' relations were good. Writing in 1946, he evidently cannot yet make a real difference between a fascist pre-war and a post-war period that is still to come.

The prelate emphasises certain differences between Slovenes and Croats in his diocese: "the Croatian-speaking populations are very poor and in general are used to contributing inadequately" to the subsistence of their parish priests, while "in the Slovene-speaking parishes the conditions of the clergy are better".³⁶ If the clergy as a whole "are obedient to the Holy See", Camozzo notes, on the other hand, there is "the drawback of the lack of fusion between the clergy of different languages".³⁷ But "in the Slavic parishes the attachment to the Holy See is not as alive as it should be. This is partly due to political reflexes in the sense that Rome is... in Italy. As a matter of principle, however, their loyalty to the Pope is beyond question".³⁸ On the other hand, there is also a difference in the participation in Easter Communion, evidently considered a good parameter to meas-

³⁶ Rijeka 1946, no. 10.

³⁷ Rijeka 1946, no. 40.

³⁸ Rijeka 1946, no. 85.

ure the adherence of the faithful: “good in the Slovenian parishes, less so in the city, worse in the Croatian parishes”.³⁹

In the appendix to his own report, which is added in Italy, Camozzo is more explicit:

In Croatian parishes, the new political conditions, the intense communist and anti-religious propaganda have led to a significant deterioration in religious and moral life, because the people, whether through ignorance or nationalistic spirit, have been easier to be misled. In the Slovenian parishes, which are more religious, the inconvenience has so far been minor; in the Italian parishes, there has been a mass exodus of the population; in the remaining ones, there has been a strong religious awakening and approach to the Church. The religious-moral future of Rijeka is largely tied to the current events.⁴⁰

The religious reaction in the face of advancing communism, Camozzo seems to imply, is producing results. However, I repeat, Camozzo's point of view is substantially third with respect to the reality also of the Slovenian and Croatian ecclesiastics, which find themselves caught between the ideal adhesion to a Yugoslav nation-state (for the diocesans of Rijeka, newly incorporated in Yugoslavia, this is a novelty) and the reality of a communist state. On the other hand, a particular and strongly felt theme in the Yugoslav Church is that of liturgical peculiarities and concessions, which in the past had been the subject of heated strife and controversy. In the small diocese of Krk, bordering Rijeka but Yugoslavian since the first post-war period, the Roman rite is in use in the Paleo-Slavic language (Glagolitic), but not in the city of Krk where, the bishop reports, it is celebrated in Latin. Here, as in the other Croatian dioceses, the Roman Ritual “in the Croatian version” approved in 1930 is in use.⁴¹ A peculiar element – punctually noted in the reports – is the concession made by the Holy See still in 1921 to sing the Gospel and the Epistle in solemn masses in the vernacular after the singing in Latin, a concession extended to the entire then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

³⁹ Rijeka 1946, no. 86.

⁴⁰ “Nelle parrocchie croate le nuove condizioni politiche, l'intensa propaganda comunista e antireligiosa portano ad un sensibile peggioramento nella vita religiosa e morale, perché il popolo sia per ignoranza, sia per spirito nazionalistico è stato più facile a lasciarsi traviare. Nelle parrocchie slovene, più religiose, l'inconveniente è stato fin'ora minore; in quelle italiane si è verificato l'esodo in massa della popolazione; nei rimasti si è verificato un forte risveglio religioso e accostamento alla Chiesa. L'avvenire religioso-morale di Fiume è in gran parte legato agli avvenimenti in corso” (Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 84).

⁴¹ Rijeka 1946, 86.

Šeper affirms that canonical norms are respected in the liturgies, reaffirming the privilege just mentioned, emphasising that “the faithful, especially in the countryside, during Masses and other sacred services sing popular songs”.⁴² According to Butorac (Dubrovnik) even sacred singing is opposed if not prevented.⁴³ However, these aspects are felt intensely in the Slovenian and Croatian dioceses. The use of the vernacular language in certain precise and circumscribed areas of the liturgy has a strong value. On the other hand, a completely different point of view is that of Camozzo, who emphasises with some concern the even partial disregard of the liturgical provisions practised so far:

Under the present circumstances, the provisions concerning the use of Latin in liturgical services are no longer fully observed in Slavic-speaking parishes. In order to prevent greater evils, it was not deemed opportune to insist on the exact observance of the prescriptions in this regard.⁴⁴

One can easily imagine how Slavic priests do nothing but willingly adapt to the provisions in force in the other Yugoslav dioceses. In this regard, one cannot but recognise against the light of day the will of a clergy that, having emerged from the ill-digested Italian domination, immediately adopted the concessions to the vernacular language in force in the Yugoslav dioceses: these priests now find themselves reunited with their motherland, and therefore apply all the prerogatives and distinctive traits – also liturgical – of the ‘Yugoslav’ church that are perceived as a sign of belonging.

6 The People

On a general and common level, the political problem overlaps with the pastoral one: as we have seen, the bishops denounce the massive atheist propaganda, which first and foremost affects young people (the elimination of religious education from schools is only one as-

⁴² “Populus fidelis, praesertim ruri, tempore Missae et aliarum sacrarum functionum cantus populares decantat” (Zagreb 1958, no. 19).

⁴³ “Cantui quoque ecclesiastico impediende regime nunc incumbit. Sic, inter alia, cantorum chorus ecclesiae cathedralis ragusinae abque ulla ratione solutus suisque privatus rebus. Omnia tentavi, at frustra, ut res in prisidium restituerentur. Immo, si quis in ecclesiis canit, ima ideo in regiminis oppositorionem (reactio) accensetur” (Dubrovnik 1948, nos. 92-93).

⁴⁴ “Nelle attuali circostanze, nelle parrocchie di lingua slava non sono più osservate completamente le disposizioni circa l’uso della lingua latina nelle funzioni liturgiche. Per impedire mali maggiori, non si è creduto opportuno di insistere sull’esatta osservanza delle prescrizioni in merito” (Rijeka 1946, no. 19).

pect of the problem), but which affects society in general (civil servants are not allowed to display attitudes close to the Church).

On the other hand, there is generally a religious situation that is still not completely compromised. "However, not everything is black and dark. There are also beautiful manifestations of faith and piety among the people".⁴⁵ Despite everything, the attachment to the faith is alive and even the customs of the people, although severely tested (and the more time passes the more this is emphasised), are still good. The people, says Camozzo, "sense" the "deaf, hidden and perverse persecution of the Church" and react by continuing to attend sacred services.⁴⁶ On the other hand, dangers to the faith and the spread of errors and estrangement was already present after the first war, recalls Garković from Zadar, and well before the advent of the new regime - which certainly aggravated the situation -, but "in general, the people kept the faith".⁴⁷

The search for pastoral action in a hostile political context is not easy. But the very fact that at least part of the clergy manages to live thanks to the support of the faithful (at least according to the bishops) is a sign that in reality, regime propaganda aside, a strong attachment to the church persists, especially in the countryside. In fact, the data that the *relationes* report on religious practice (attendance at mass and Easter communion) do indeed show a marked difference between town and country (confirming a well-known paradigm), but percentages of those attending sacred services that in many cases exceed 80% of the baptised. Obviously not everywhere, and with fluctuations, but these data denote a strong resistance of religious attachment.⁴⁸

Thus, Garković was able to state in 1958 that "in general, one can say that the religious and moral state in the population is still good",⁴⁹ although he pointed out the problem represented by the weakening of religious sentiments, especially in the cities. On the one hand, "the youth scarcely attend churches and even less the Sacraments, although they abstain from politics" and this because "they have many opportunities for distraction". The condition of civil servants, described as "addicts of materialistic", who cannot go to church or perform all religious practices, is different.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ "Non tamen omnia nigra et obscura sunt. Dantur et pulchrae manifestationes fidei et pietatis in populo" (Zagreb 1958, no. 100).

⁴⁶ Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 36.

⁴⁷ Zadar 1958, no. 16.

⁴⁸ "In tredecim locis a 80-100% sacro adsistunt; in quatuordecim a 60-75%; in novem 50-55%; in tredecim a 30-45%; in uno 15%. Generatim percentualis virorum numerus debilior est quam feminarum" (Dubrovnik 1958, no. 86).

⁴⁹ Zadar 1958, 16.

⁵⁰ Zadar 1958, 84.

Attention to marriage and married life is high, and responds to precise requests in the questionnaire. While dangers are already being felt at the end of the 1940s, ten years later these are more evident. On the other hand, the question of conjugal morality is certainly not a new problem, which was already well in the minds of this and other episcopates before the war. Šeper, the future Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, does not hesitate to list, even more carefully than others, all these evils, identifying the two worst in blasphemy and vulgarity (which he also emphasises is said by women and young people) and in “conjugal onanism”, the “white plague”. In essence, the practice of contraception is also propagated by the state as a remedy for large number of abortions.⁵¹ According to Šeper, it is not so much a question of lesser or greater faith, but the fact that those people who live in a more ‘natural’ way are less corrupted by the contagiousness of modern civilisation.

But these are evils (vices, divorce, abortion) that are fostered by government policy: the deviation and estrangement come from there in the first place.⁵² Those most at risk are the young, who lack religious education and who are easy prey to the materialistic novelties of contemporary society (“*iuventus practico materialismo semper magis imbuta est*”),⁵³ here, in addition, it is precisely the harm presented by the “*materialismum theoreticum*” supported by the government that seems to affect part of the young people, who pherepsexperience the same general alienation “*a praxi religiosa*” as their peers in other countries.⁵⁴

Moreover, the non-participation of several families in catechetical courses of preparation for First Communion is usually motivated by indifferentism or fear.

The impression is that attending church, however, becomes an occasion for dissent, sometimes underground, but still a behaviour not in line with the regime’s wishes. It is a different matter to what extent the regime’s propaganda actually succeeds in achieving its aim of eliminating the religious dimension from the population, although its successes do not seem so different – perhaps just faster – than what happens in Western societies. Šeper again points out, not with-

⁵¹ “Quoad populi due maxime deploranda sunt: blasphemiae et obscena verba quae magis magisque in usu populi, etiam feminarum et iuventutis, sunt; onanismus coniugalibus (‘pestis alba’) qui semper magis grassatur non tantum in maioribus urbis, sed etiam ruri. Imo ultimis temporibus talis praxis (contraceptio) etiam a potestate publica maxime propagatur, uti remedium contra enormem numerum abortum!” (Zagreb 1958, no. 84).

⁵² It is not just secularism that subverts all faith in God, “quam gubernium Iugoslaviae ideis materialismi marxistici ductum ubique in educatione puerorum et iuventutis, in vita culturali, sociali et oeconomica propagat et applicat” (Krk 1948, no. 1).

⁵³ Zagreb 1958, no. 84.

⁵⁴ Zagreb 1958, [no. 100].

out satisfaction, that in the last census, at the end of the 1950s, 87% of the population claimed to believe in God.⁵⁵

7 Non-Catholics

In such a complex reality marked by religious plurality, this generally tends to remain in the background of reports, at least in dioceses with a Catholic majority. It is probably the very typology of the questions in the questionnaire that does not offer many insights. On the other hand, the perspective of these bishops and the demands of the Holy See is to all intents and purposes internal to Catholicism.

Let us go into detail. One of the few questions that explicitly refer to the relationship with non-Catholics is that concerning mixed marriages, which are punctually and meticulously highlighted, even where they have insignificant numerical consistency. Even minimal evidence of mixed marriages is denounced.⁵⁶

In dioceses with a Catholic majority, Muslim and Orthodox presences are recorded as a result of the transfer of officials or military personnel. Once again, the danger posed by the state authorities, leading to threatening mixes that were a harbinger of error and instability, can be read against the light.

In the 1958 reports, the presence of non-traditional Christian sects active in the territory, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, began to be recorded.⁵⁷

In the dioceses subject to Propaganda Fide one would expect a greater emphasis on the subject. Instead, the communications of the Bosnian bishops are much more careful to emphasise internal tensions, such as those between secular clergy and Franciscans, in dioceses where most parishes continue to be entrusted to Franciscans: in Mostar there are 21 secular priests and 83 Franciscans. However, there is no shortage of indications of suffering: "in Herzegovina, the Catholic border is shifting westwards. Parishes where the Catholic element lived on the border with the schismatic element see the number of faithfuls dwindling".⁵⁸

Of some interest, on the other hand, is the report sent by the bishop of Skopje in 1958, which is actually a border observation point.

⁵⁵ Zagreb 1958, [no. 100].

⁵⁶ E.g. Maribor 1958, no. 88, for the case of the Evangelical presence confined in the Prekmurje region.

⁵⁷ "Iam tempore ante ultimum bellum variae sectae protestanticae propagari ceperunt, quod etiam nunc continuatur, uti fit in aliis, etiam cultioribus, Europae regionibus (v.g. adventistae, Jehovahistae, pentecostiani, baptistae)" (Zagreb 1958, no. 16).

⁵⁸ "Limes catholicus in Herzegovina versus occidentem declinat. Paroeciae ubi elementum catholicum in confinio cum elemento schismatico vivebat quoad numerum fidelium valde decreverunt" (Mostar 1958).

Here, Catholics are a small minority. In 1947 and 1949, says the bishop, “a systematic attempt was made to shake up our Catholic positions by the application of violent means against priests. There was an attempt to force priests out of their places of duty”.⁵⁹ There is an urgent problem of the education of the local clergy (Catholics here are mostly Albanian). The newly made seminary is now no longer diocesan property and the seminarians have been dispersed; some newly ordained after the war have gone abroad. A serious problem of the religious education of the faithful arises; and is also a ‘national’ and linguistic problem. The bishop writes:

Religious ignorance is the greatest enemy of religion. This enemy grows stronger every day. There is no Catholic press here. Books dealing with religious problems no longer come out, except to mock religion. The only exception in this regard are prayer books: every now and then small prayer books are printed in Serbo-Croatian; a little while ago a devotional book was finally published in Slovenian as well. But our Albanian Catholics, who are a strong majority among the Catholics in the dioceses of Skopje and Bar, have not even had a prayer book or catechism in their own language, not only now, but not even under the first Yugoslavia, when Albanian nationality was not officially recognised and when the Albanians had no political and cultural rights.⁶⁰

8 Conclusions

In this rather gloomy context, the rare moments of hope are still offered to the bishops by the knowledge that even in the face of so many difficulties a significant attachment to the faith still persists in the population. The evils of the contemporary world, which the Pacellian Church seeks to counter, take on an even harsher significance in the communist world. Not only the evils of society, but also those sustained by a manifestly anti-religious state. The reports that come from a terrain of bitter battle in their own way mark the begin-

⁵⁹ Skopje 1958.

⁶⁰ “L’ignoranza religiosa è il più grave nemico della religione. Questo nemico diventa ogni giorno più forte. Da noi non esiste una stampa cattolica. Non escono più i libri che trattino i problemi religiosi, se non per deridere la religione. L’unica eccezione in questo riguardo sono i libri di preghiera: ogni tanto vengono stampati piccoli libri di preghiera in lingua serbo-croata; poco fa uscì finalmente un libro di devozione pure in lingua slovena. Ma i nostri cattolici albanesi che sono una forte maggioranza tra i cattolici della diocesi di Skopje e Antivari non hanno avuto neppure un libro di preghiera od un catechismo nella loro lingua non solamente adesso ma neanche sotto la prima Jugoslavia, quando ufficialmente non fu riconosciuta la nazionalità albanese e quando gli Albanesi non avevano nessun diritto politico e culturale” (Skopje 1958; original in Italian).

ning of that *détente* that in the following decade will find concrete ways if not of dialogue at least of a possible *modus vivendi*. Even in the Pacelli years, however, Yugoslavia retained its own remarkable peculiarity compared to the rest of the communist countries, which did not escape the protagonists themselves. Finally we can consider some of the observations on the condition of the Church in Yugoslavia that the Bishop of Bar Tokić formulated in 1958:

The Moscow-Belgrade conflict [...] has greatly benefited the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, where freedom of religion is certainly greater than in other communist states, except perhaps Poland. Although Yugoslav laws give religious freedom, this is practically very limited. Military officers and teachers in all schools cannot openly perform their religious duties, for other employees freedom depends on whether they can easily be replaced by atheists or not.

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia is certainly against religion like all Communist parties in other states. Its valuable instrument in the fight against religion are the clergy associations. The 'Orthodox' and Muslim associations are not of such importance because the Communist regime has bought off the leaders of these religions. More important are the Catholic associations. The communists know that it is not easy to separate Catholics from the Holy See.⁶¹

The point of view of difference with respect to other religious communities, looked upon with an evidently contemptuous tone, also because they were incapable of placing real curbs on the communist expansion, takes us back to a climate of distrust and conflict that characterised the Yugoslavian reality. The prospect is certainly not one of ecumenical dialogue, even in the face of a government that advocates atheism in practice. On the other hand, precisely the relatively low participation of the clergy in pro-government associations, as well as the unity shown by churchmen and the majority of the faithful, are a sign of a solidity that, on the whole, does not fail.

61 "Il conflitto Mosca-Belgrado [...] ha giovato molto alla Chiesa Cattolica in Jugoslavia, dove la libertà di religione è certamente più grande che negli altri stati comunisti, eccetta forse la Polonia. Benché le leggi jugoslave danno la libertà religiosa, questa è praticamente molto limitata. Gli ufficiali militari e gli insegnanti di tutte le scuole non possono apertamente fare i loro doveri religiosi, per gli altri impiegati la libertà dipende dalla circostanza se si possono facilmente sostituire cogli atei o no. Il Partito comunista della Jugoslavia è certamente contra la religione come tutti i partiti comunisti negli altri stati. Il suo valido strumento nella lotta contro la religione sono le associazioni del clero. Le associazioni "ortodosse" e mussulmane non sono di tanta importanza perché il regime comunista ha comprato i capi di queste religioni. Più importanti sono le associazioni cattoliche. I comunisti sanno che non è facile separare cattolici dalla Santa Sede" (Bar 1958).

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The Scandinavian Catholic Missions in the *relationes ad limina* to Propaganda Fide (1948-58)

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Abstract The Scandinavian Peninsula was a Catholic mission territory subjected to the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith until 1977. During the 1950s, these Nordic missions were gradually raised to the level of local churches, despite the slow progress of evangelisation. The *relationes ad limina* that bishops and vicars sent to Propaganda Fide in this decade and the reports of the Apostolic Visit of 1956 represent two different points of view through which the article tries to define the achievement of the Congregation's objectives, the missionary strategies, the commitment of religious orders and congregations.

Keywords Scandinavia. Catholic mission. Catholic evangelisation. Propaganda Fide. Nordic countries. Missionary congregations. Missionary orders.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Scandinavian Catholic Missions According to the *relationes ad limina*. – 3 Missionary Strategies (and Abilities) in Comparison. – 4 Conclusions.



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1 Introduction

Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden were European mission territories subjected to the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) until 1977.

The Reformation and the consequent imposition of Lutheranism as the official religion of the State by the local monarchies (according to the principle *Cuius regio eius religio*) during the seventeenth century implicated a period of decline for Catholicism in the Scandinavian Peninsula, worsen by a severe anti-Catholic legislation. Catholics achieved formal equality in Denmark when freedom of religion was introduced with the Constitution of 1849, as well as in Finland with Act on Freedom of Religion in 1923. In 1845, non-Lutheran churches were permitted to establish communities in Norway, but the constitutional ban on the Society of Jesus remained until 1956. In 1869, the Swedish Dissenter Act legalised conversions to other Christian denominations, but full religious freedom was introduced only in 1951.

These openings to Catholicism during the nineteenth century together with the renovated impulse which characterised the missionary activity, meant for the Scandinavian countries their transformation into autonomous mission territories, no more subjected to the Apostolic Prefecture of North Pole or to the Apostolic Vicariate of the Nordic Missions.¹

During the pontificate of Pope Pius XII, in particular in 1953 and in 1955, the missionary churches in Scandinavia (with the exception of northern and central Norway) obtained the definitive *status* of dioceses, thus concluding that ecclesiastical *iter* through which the Congregation of Propaganda Fide aims at the constitution of the so-called 'native' or 'local' churches, with their own ecclesiastical hierarchy.

As a consequence, the second post-war period could be considered an interesting point of observation of the Catholic Church in Scandinavia, presuming a consolidated situation on an institutional level, but also considering the missionary strategies, the presence of religious orders and congregations, the achievement of Propaganda's objectives such as for example the appointment of the native clergy, etc.

In this perspective, the *relationes ad limina* addressed by the Scandinavian bishops and apostolic vicars to the Roman Congregation between 1948 and 1958 have been considered in this article as the primary source, useful to give an immediate image of the state of these missions from an internal point of view.

Moreover, the article considers the four final reports that Mons. Antoon Hanssen, coadjutor in Roermond, wrote as a result of the Apostolic Visit to Scandinavia he made from May to August 1956 on be-

1 Tüchle, H. "Hilfe auf dem Weg zur Selbständigkeit".

half of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide. They often give a more exhaustive contextualisation, but also a critical point of view on those aspects that the Holy See considered crucial in a missionary context.

The aim of this article is to contribute to the historiography of the Catholic Church in Scandinavia,² which has focused also on the origins and consequences of a deep-rooted anti-Catholic sentiment in these countries, actually, pointing out the transnational character of anti-Catholicism and its importance for the processes of national identity formation in the official Protestant countries in general.³

Moreover, the topic could give a more exhaustive image of the situation of the Catholic Church in Europe as well as of its missionary activity in the second post-war period during which it had to rethink its presence and its methods, in the face of important political, social and cultural changes that affected the extra-European territories in particular.

The Scandinavian missions represented a special testbed as well, characterised by very similar dynamics despite a different background. The traditional missionary approach, in this case also conditioned by the anti-Protestant controversy that still characterised the pontificate of Pius XII, indirectly clashed with a new sensitivity, less inclined to quantify the progress of the apostolate in terms of conversions and foundation of churches and mission stations, but interested in investing in the quality of the apostolate and in the implementation of initiatives (press, radio, etc.) aimed at earning social visibility and influence to the Catholic minority.⁴ Consequently, from these two approaches derived different interpretations of the causes of the objective difficulties of Catholicism in terms of conversions and of struggle against the spread of religious indifferentism.

2 The Scandinavian Catholic Missions According to the *relationes ad limina*

Between 1948 and 1958 each of the bishops and vicars of Scandinavia sent to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith at least one *relatio ad limina*, based on the questionnaire it formulated in 1922 for the mission territories.⁵ The answers to the 90 points of the questionnaire are rather telegraphic, consequently many *relationes* consid-

² Cf. Pagano, "Iniziative di studio ed edizioni delle fonti".

³ Cf. the essays in Werner, Harvard, *European Anti-Catholicism*.

⁴ For the analysis of the 'ecclesiocentric' and 'soteriological' concepts, cf. Mondin, *Dizionario storico e teologico delle missioni*, 240-2.

⁵ AAS (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*), 14 (1922), 287-307.

ered in this article do not count more than twenty pages.⁶ This conciseness could be justified by the fact that bishops and vicars had to report annually about the progress of the missions through the so-called *Prospectus status missionis*: therefore, the Congregation was constantly up-to-date with the results achieved in every field of the missionary apostolate thanks to these detailed reports made up of numbers (Catholic presence, conversions, weddings, places of worship, priests, schools etc.), to which the senders sometimes added final brief comments.

The same attention to the development of the 'visible church' also characterises the questionnaire and consequently the *relationes* themselves: what emerges is a rather homogeneous scenario, where Catholics in Scandinavia represented a tiny minority. In Denmark, for example, where the balance was generally considered more encouraging than that of the other Scandinavian countries, there were 23,000 Catholics on 4,100,000 inhabitants in 1949, that increased to 26,872 on 4,309,000 inhabitants in 1952. But, as visitor Hanssen pointed out, this was a relative advantage attributable to a Polish Catholic *enclave* established in the southern part of the country in the early twentieth century.

Arriving in Denmark from Finland and Sweden, one has the impression of a country where the Catholic Church really means something; but coming from Germany, Belgium or Holland the impression is that of a weak Catholicism of the diaspora. The advantage of Denmark over the other Scandinavian countries is due to the strong immigration of Polish peasants at the beginning of the century.⁷

In relation to the number of inhabitants, the Catholic presence recorded the lowest level in the Apostolic Vicariate of Central Norway: in 1949 the International Agency Fides recorded 233 Catholics out of 500,000 inhabitants, increased to 430 in 1958.⁸ Finnish Catholics (2,078 on 4,121,835 inhabitants in 1953) were numerically inferior

⁶ For the period here considered, Mons. Johannes Wember (1939-1976) did not send reports from the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Norway, while there are two *relationes* from the diocese of Oslo which Mons. Jacques Mangers (1932-1964) wrote in French and without following the trace of the questionnaire. The report that Mons. Theodor Suhr (1938-1964) sent from Denmark in 1952 has 70 pages, but it covers 13 years (1939-52).

⁷ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 95. Unless otherwise specified, all the translations are by the Author.

⁸ According to official statistics published by the International Agency Fides for 1949 there were: 14,272 Catholics (on 6,950,000 inhabitants) in Sweden; 3,800 Catholics (on 2,340,000 inhabitants) in the Apostolic Vicariate of Oslo; 226 Catholics (on 360,000 inhabitants) in the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Norway; 1,780 Catholics (on 3,955,000 inhabitants) in Finland (Agenzia Internazionale Fides, *Le missioni cattoliche*, 62-7).

to the Orthodox (70,000), actually surpassing only the Jews (2,000) and the Muslims (600) even if, as Bishop Wilhelm Cobben (1933-1967) highlighted, this mission could not be compared to the other Scandinavian ones, due to its latest foundation (1920).⁹

The Catholic presence was generally represented by converts and their children. Bishops and vicars claimed a slow but steady progress of these numbers, however with some clarifications. For example, Mangers explained that the increase from 4,500 to 5,544 Catholics in the five year from 1953 to 58 in the diocese of Oslo, was mostly due to the presence of 600 Hungarian refugees, while there were only 241 conversions.

Furthermore, there were territories that the missionaries had not approached yet: Lapland, because of the difficult language and the nomadic life, and northern Finland because sparsely populated.

The Scandinavian episcopate agreed that over the last twenty years many prejudices against the Catholic Church had fallen. This was proved by the progressive amendment of the anti-Catholic legislation, despite the absence of political representation or political weight. It had gained esteem and consideration among the population (Hanssen underlined that the episcopate's conduct during the Second World War played an important role in this sense, improving relations also with the respective governments and monarchies) and "being a Catholic was no longer considered a dishonour or an inferiority as it was still twenty or thirty years ago".¹⁰ According to Bishop Johannes Müller (1922-1957), the condition of the Catholic Church in Sweden had greatly improved after the law on religious freedom in force since January 1952; despite the fact that the approval process had been slowed down by fear of the "Catholic danger",¹¹ he claimed that Catholics were no longer considered enemies of the country. The fight against the Catholic Church had almost ceased, while the attacks from the Protestant sects, Pentecostals in particular, had strengthened.

Non-Catholics used to participate in Catholic celebrations as well as in apologetic or doctrinal lectures organised in or outside the churches (in Denmark, "highly skilled priests"¹² preached several times a year on radio broadcasts), while the Catholic press had a good circulation also among the Protestants. Each mission published one or more journals, such as the Swedish fortnightly *Hemmet och Helgedomen* (*Focus et Ara*) and the monthly *Skyddsängel* (*Anegelus Custos*) for Swedish youth, the Finnish *Uskon Sanoma*, and *St. Olav* in Nor-

⁹ Finland 1948, 615. Cf. Pettinaroli, *La politique russe du Sainte-Siège*.

¹⁰ Oslo 1954, 123.

¹¹ Cf. Werner, "The Catholic Danger".

¹² Denmark 1952, 487.

way; other journals such as the Danish *Catholica*, the Finnish *Documenta* and the Swedish *Credo* were addressed to the academic *milieu*.¹³

However, as clearly explained by Mangers, “we cannot expect mass conversions yet”: in the “highly civilised” and “advanced” (recurring adjectives both in the *relationes* and in Hanssen’s reports) but at the same time secularised and materialistic Scandinavian societies, “religious indifferentism has horribly grown”.¹⁴

“The Protestant or rather materialistic environment” made religious practice often rather difficult, consequently the Catholic minority had to oppose a deep religious conviction and a strong will in order to not to be “infected”.¹⁵ Coexistence with Lutherans and “neo-pagans” inevitably caused some spiritual damages concerning religious practice, but also Catholic education of the children, and marriage morality.¹⁶ Bishops and vicars considered mixed marriages between Catholics and Protestants an inevitable consequence of being a religious minority; priests had to treat these couples with a certain indulgence to avoid their estrangement and guarantee the Catholic education of the children.

Facing these already deeply-rooted tendencies, the Church had to put efforts into the defence of the Catholic minority from the influences of the context, not always with positive results. Once again, the bishop of Oslo expressed his opinion more openly: the first generation of Norwegian converts “held up quite well”, while the second and the third ones often lost themselves, despite the missionaries’ efforts. Few left the Church officially, “but indifference does its damages”.¹⁷

Moreover, as for the rest of European and Western society, the *liberalis vitae consuetudo* had its repercussions on sexual morality (divorce, abortion, voluntary limitation of births, etc.). However, these aspects are not particularly highlighted in the *relationes*. The tones used by the bishops distinguished themselves from those – quite exasperated – used by other ecclesiastical personalities in their letters to Rome, in a sort of attempt to justify “the apparent sterility of missionary work”. Father Govaart, the general superior of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart, answering to the Cardinal Fumasoni Biondi about the religious situation in Finland, wrote that in these countries, where four centuries of ruling Lutheranism had caused a disastrous level of religious nihilism, the work of these “heroic missionaries” could not be very fruitful.

¹³ Norway did not have a proper scientific journal, but Hanssen considered the level of *St. Olav* still too high for simple people, while Bishop Mangers considered it “probably the best in Scandinavia” (Oslo 1958, 153).

¹⁴ Denmark 1952, 527.

¹⁵ Oslo 1954, 123.

¹⁶ Sweden 1954, 405.

¹⁷ Oslo 1958, 152.

A Lutheranism which has even lost faith in the divinity of Jesus has reigned here for centuries with a consequent practical materialism and widespread sensualism that produce an environment which is refractory to the Catholic religion: it is like a modern paganism, which has rejected redemption.¹⁸

The *relationes* tried to catch the attention of the Roman Congregation to 'structural' deficiencies that affected all the Scandinavian missions. The most serious problem, the "vital, a to be or not to be issue for the Catholic Church"¹⁹ was the scholastic one. For the period here considered, there were no higher-grade Catholic schools (only Denmark had catholic middle schools) and parish primary schools were insufficient. Private schools were "barely tolerated" in Norway²⁰ and only Danish Catholic school have received public subsidies since 1946. Nevertheless, Bishop Theodor Suhr (1938-1964), as well as all the other heads of the Scandinavian missions, lamented the impossibility of Catholic schools to compete with public Protestant ones, defined as "sumptuous"²¹ (*luxuriosas*), equipped with every service and "perfect from all points of view".²²

The bishops in particular believed that not even the teaching (given by sisters, often too old) was up to the high Scandinavian standard which therefore required Catholic schools not only modern structures, but also "competent staff", "teachers of good culture, morally strong and animated by apostolic zeal".²³ For these reasons, many Catholic parents sent their children to Protestant state schools, also because sometimes these were much closer, while Catholic education was guaranteed by the parish catechism, although with some gaps. In Denmark, for example, one third of the parishes did not have a Catholic school: the priests' efforts to guarantee the teaching of Christian doctrine directly in the children's houses "are greater than the results", while the others had to be considered practically "lost for the church".²⁴

The places of worship were another 'structural' concern that bishops and vicars had in common. The Scandinavian missions, for the period here considered, were organised in *quasi*-parishes, for the most part with their own church or chapel and a permanently resident priest. The great distances that characterise these countries prevented a con-

¹⁸ Govaart, *Letter* 1953, 50-64.

¹⁹ Ap. Visit. Sweden 1954, 91.

²⁰ Oslo 1954, 122.

²¹ Denmark 1952, 502.

²² Oslo 1954, 122.

²³ Sweden 1954, 408.

²⁴ Denmark 1952, 510.

siderable number of Catholics from participating in religious celebrations. For this reason, bishops and vicars were generally worried, despite the financial difficulties, to expand the offer of places of worship, in addition to the semi-public chapels made available by religious orders and to other halls set up for this purpose.

Almost all the authors of the *relationes* (and the apostolic visitor himself) considered the 'distance issue' a not secondary obstacle to the religious practice. Some of them even mentioned the difficulties experienced by the priests themselves, in terms of efforts to guarantee regular visits to the most distant communities, but also in terms of personal solitude.²⁵

Concerning the clergy involved in the *cura animarum*, numbers were also quite contained and relatively stable during the 1950s; but while bishops Suhr and Müller complained that the number of priests was not sufficient for the needs of the Danish and Swedish missions (97 and 57 respectively, even though they argued that other priests would be economically unsustainable), Mons. Johannes Rùth (1953-1974) considered the five fathers of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (to whom the Vicariate of Central Norway had been assigned) sufficient in relation to the scarce presence of Catholic believers (430 in 1958).

Generally, the regular clergy played a significant role, in particular thanks to the *jus commissionis* or *commissio missionum*, according to which the pope assigned a mission to a single religious order or missionary congregation with the main objective of avoiding rivalry between missionaries belonging to different orders or nationalities, which could negatively affect the evangelisation progresses.²⁶ In addition to the Vicariate of Central Norway, the missions of northern Norway and Finland were assigned respectively to the Missionaries of the Holy Family (6 in 1956) and to the Fathers of the Sacred Heart (5 in 1948).

In the other Scandinavian missions, which were assigned to the secular clergy, the regular one was generally in the majority, predominantly Jesuits (from the province of Cologne) and Dominicans (from the province of Paris), followed by Redemptorists, Franciscans and Marists (from the Dutch province), variously involved in parishes, in the university apostolate, etc. There were also not incardinated priests, responsible for the spiritual assistance of linguistic minority groups, for example two Italian Conventuals Franciscans in Sweden, an Italian priest and a German one (responsible for the Polish and Baltic refugees) in Denmark.

The Danish diocese had about ten male orders and congregations within its borders and, according to Suhr, the number of regular

²⁵ Sweden 1954, 402; Oslo 1958, 149.

²⁶ Cf. Metzler, *La Santa Sede e le missioni*, 47-8.

priests had always exceeded that of seculars (respectively 63 and 34 in 1952), who also managed 16 parishes on a total of 36 and a consequent lower number of believers (10,200 against 16,100). Only in the diocese of Oslo, contrary to the other Scandinavian missions, the number of seculars exceeded that of regulars, even if only little.

The female religious were in clear majority compared to the male clergy. In 1952 in Denmark there were 759 sisters (393 sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry, followed by 116 sisters of St. Hedwig), a “surprising” number according to Hanssen, who defines their work “a Catholic oasis”;²⁷ in Oslo there were 480 sisters (of whom 250 sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry). variously involved in the management of kindergartens, primary schools, orphanages, hospitals and retirement homes, generally all those charitable institutes *diffundendae fidei utilibus*. Apart from the deficiencies highlighted in the teaching field, considered not up to the Scandinavian standards, in general the *relationes* express great esteem for the “invaluable services”²⁸ provided by female religious congregations as the best collaborators of bishops and priests in the Scandinavian missions, helping to drop prejudices against the Catholic Church. Moreover, their health-care institutes, so useful for spreading the faith because frequented also by non-Catholics, were the only Catholic ones able to compete with the high standards of these countries. For these reasons, despite the apparent considerable numbers, the decline in female vocations was a great concern for the Scandinavian episcopate. Hanssen also showed to Propaganda Fide another interesting aspect. The remarkable financial resources of some female congregations (“their hospitals [of the sisters of St. Joseph] earn a lot”) certainly represented an considerable help for the needs of the parishes, often without a fixed income; but at the same time this dependence gave the impression that the apostolate was carried on entirely by the sisters. This situation was particularly evident in the diocese of Oslo, where people joked about the birth of an “ecclesiastical matriarchy”.²⁹ In the visitor’s opinion, this was a sign of regression, therefore suggesting to no longer concentrate large female congregations in hospitals, given also the growing competition from public institutes.

Small groups of Petites Soeurs de Jésus or de Charles de Foucauld were in Copenhagen (3), Helsinki (3) and Oslo (2).³⁰ Both the bishops and the visitor were sceptical about their attempts to catholicise the Scandinavian working class by sharing its lifestyle (Müller de-

²⁷ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 116.

²⁸ Oslo 1954, 122.

²⁹ Ap. Visit. Norway 1956, 26, 29.

³⁰ Another small group was 170 kilometres from Helsinki, near the Russian border and Bishop Cobben gave it a temporary permission.

nied them access to Sweden). Certainly, the Catholic Church had little hold on it; nonetheless, they considered their tiny presence, their approach (with their “poor dress, almost exotic”) as well as their detachment from the parochial reality worthless for the missions, while it would have been more useful to send a Dominican or a German Jesuit expert on social issues, to take contact with the union leaders.³¹

Since its origins, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith had insisted on the importance of supporting vocations among the locals. Already in the *Instructio* of 1659 and again in the missionary encyclicals of the twentieth century, the Holy See reaffirmed the fundamental role of the local clergy who, thanks to the knowledge of the language and culture, would be able to preach the Gospel in a more effective way. The numbers relating to the indigenous Scandinavian clergy in the 1950s justify Propaganda’s insistence on this point. The foreign clergy, mostly of northern European origin (Germany, Holland, France) was still in clear majority. The Danish Suhr was the only native bishop and, although his diocese was the only Scandinavian one assigned to the native clergy, he considered the 42 Danish priests (including 13 who voluntarily opted for Danish nationality) still insufficient if related to the Catholic population. The Swedish diocese, where the Bavarian Bishop Müller referred to himself, to his Danish coadjutor Nelson and to his German Vicar Meyer as “naturalised Swedish”,³² had only 7 native priests on a total of 50 in 1954. The Vicariate of Central Norway, which doubled the number of Catholics in 10 years, had gained only one native vocation in the same period of time (1949-58). Consequently, local representation in the *Consilium Missionis* was generally a minority or even absent.

The *relationes* do not analyse this aspect, but the causes of such a disappointing situation compared to the expectations of Propaganda Fide are understandable, that is the low number of Catholics as well as a deep-rooted anti-Catholic prejudice which, “nurtured since childhood”,³³ made the conversion a brave but rare choice. These reasons – together with financial straits – had probably persuaded the bishops and vicars of the Scandinavian missions to not support the foundation of an inter-Scandinavian seminary. The proposal, strongly supported by the prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide Cardinal Van Rossum during his visit to Scandinavia in 1923, came to nothing after his death. Hanssen himself rejected the project as a premature detachment from the Catholic countries and disrespectful of the cultural differences existing between the Scandinavian peoples.³⁴

³¹ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 121-3.

³² Sweden 1954, 402.

³³ Central Norway 1958, 123.

³⁴ Ap. Visit Denmark 1956, 103.

According to the authors, the same ecclesiastical education received in European seminaries, as well as the missionaries' commitment in the study of the Scandinavian languages, guaranteed a substantial equality between foreign clergy and native priests. Nevertheless, Vicar Rùth exposed himself in his *relatio* by expressing an unsolicited opinion, namely that "the care of souls cannot be entrusted to the native clergy yet".³⁵

Presumably, this stance was based on the effective lack of aspiring priests, but some of Hanssen's notes reveal that there was still a prejudice against converts, even if Christians. He reported the opinion of an old Redemptorist, according to whom "Danes are not made for life in an order or congregation; they are practical and materialistic by nature". More properly, Müller would have said that "we can't expect from them [local priests] all the abilities [*finezze*]; they made a great sacrifice with their conversion [...] they are in another stage of the spiritual life and have their own character, which is neither French nor German".³⁶ Moreover, it was common opinion that a Catholic priest who studied abroad was highly respected, but at the same time the converts were treated as foreigners in their homeland, because Catholicism was perceived as something foreign. As a consequence, those priests were often disappointed or even embittered, a mood sometimes exacerbated by loneliness and lack of dialogue with the bishop or with other priests.³⁷

These were only some aspects concerning that judge of value which Propaganda Fide considered an obstacle to the transformation of the missions into autonomous local churches, as long as the indigenous clergy was considered a mere auxiliary force to the missionary one.

Nonetheless, all the *relationes* reassured the Congregation about the harmony that reigned between the secular and regular clergy, as well as between foreign and local clergy.

Concluding with the *iudicium summatis* of each *relatio*, the lack of places of worship and schools was presented as the sore point of the Scandinavian missions, within a situation that had gradually become positive for the Catholic Church. The focus was on the development of the 'visible church', whence the emphasis on the need for more economic resource from Propaganda Fide: to consolidate the existing institutions and bring them to the level required by what they considered high Scandinavian standards, but also for the expansion of the church by opening new stations and building churches and chapels.

³⁵ Central Norway 1958, 132.

³⁶ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 117.

³⁷ Ap. Visit. Sweden 1956, 82.

3 Missionary Strategies (and Abilities) in Comparison

Visitor Hanssen's reports, sent to Propaganda Fide in 1957, have been particularly useful for a more precise contextualisation of the history and situation of the Scandinavian missions, since the *relationes* are often synthetic or even absent (northern Norway).

This comparison, however, also brought to light a more problematic reading than that emerged from the *relationes*, when the visitor highlighted deficiencies in those fields considered fundamental for the success of the missionary apostolate.

In the past, a good and diligent priest was sufficient; today, these highly civilised countries required much more from a priest [...] he can't carry on the Catholic Church if he doesn't know the language well and if he's not completely familiar with the culture of the country where he works.³⁸

This kind of observations – concerning the clergy's skills – recurs in each report: contrary to what the bishops and vicars answered to question number 29, Hanssen highlighted significant gaps in the level of knowledge of Scandinavian languages by the missionary clergy, who was still in clear majority compared to the local one.

He was probably aware of the great importance that the Congregation of Propaganda Fide had always given to this aspect: an imperfect spiritual assistance, as well as a superficial comprehension of catechism, were the more obvious consequences.

The visitor's remarks were mostly addressed to male religious congregations. According to Hanssen, the regular clergy had an advantage over the secular one, particularly in these countries, characterised by great distances: cohabitation or frequent contacts, mutual support, the superior's and the province's leadership protected the priests from that isolation (both geographic and spiritual) which often affected the secular clergy. But at the same time this could be an obstacle to the apostolate:

at home they [the regular priests] speak their own language, they don't distance themselves far enough from their education and culture to be able to conform to the country in which they must gain souls to God.³⁹

The priests of the Sacred Heart of the Dutch province [...] the first difficulty they encounter is that of languages: Finnish, which be-

³⁸ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 105-6.

³⁹ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 105.

longs to a group of completely foreign languages, is particularly difficult. As long as they do not speak well the languages of the country, the Finnish Catholic Church remains a foreign church for them.⁴⁰

The average age was another problem that affected the Scandinavian missions. For example, the Redemptorist fathers in Denmark were quite old and conservative, but also the missionaries of the Holy Family who led the Vicariate of Northern Norway or the fathers of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary in central Norway have lost the enthusiasm and the persuasive strength necessary to work successfully among Protestants.⁴¹

Probably, these aspects also affected the missionaries' ability to adapt the Catholic message to the Scandinavian historical-cultural context, pursuing a "special spirituality" characterised by forms and contents "too traditional and not appropriate for the Danish [or Scandinavian in general] character", that is a spirituality more compliant with a Catholic country than with a protestant one. In this sense, the most exemplifying case is that of the Montfort missionaries (Company of Mary) in Denmark: because of their peculiar Marian worship, they conveyed concepts about the Virgin Mary without the "necessary prudence".⁴²

Therefore, the missionary clergy in Scandinavia suffered from a lack of skill and update on several levels, which, according to Hansen, precluded the possibility of – citing a recurring expression in his reports – "being Danish with the Danes", "Finnish with Finns" etc. and essentially the first of the main causes for the stagnation of the apostolate.

Actually, the visitor got also signs of restlessness in this sense: while northern Norway mission, for example, "suffered from the lack of young, zealous and skilled priests",⁴³ in Finland there were "young forces who want to move forward [...] to try always something new, to keep the apostolate alive and thus encourage the priests and the laity". The danger was not laziness but disillusionment and discouragement.

[Missionaries] started their work with youthful enthusiasm. The critical point comes after about ten years, when most of them realise that they will not get more results than their predecessors. The early enthusiasm surrenders to resignation, to discontent with

⁴⁰ Ap. Visit. Finland 1956, 270-1.

⁴¹ Ap. Visit. Norway 1956, 55.

⁴² Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 112.

⁴³ Ap. Visit. Norway 1956, 62

themselves and with the others and [...] to criticism of the leadership [*direzione*, i.e. the Vicar], to mutual criticism.⁴⁴

Financial resources, but also impulse and leadership were solicited from the bishop of Oslo too:

The issue is urgent! Otherwise – as a serious and eminent priest wrote – the result is a ‘spiritus resignationis, passivitatis, criticae negativae, mutuae suspicionis et detractationis, divisionis et particularismi inter clerum’.⁴⁵

However, according to Hanssen’s reports, all the bishops and vicars of Scandinavia were targets of criticism from their own clergy: they were good and paternal people, but weak in leadership (Cobben and Mangers) or dictators (Wember). The eighty-year-old Müller was no longer able to face the problems.

Generally, they were blamed for the little listening given to the priests (who also had few occasions to meet) and, as a consequence, for the lack of understanding of the concrete problems of the missions; also the Danish Suhr, for example, who was highly esteemed (“compared to the other Scandinavian dioceses, the episcopal leadership in Copenhagen works well”),⁴⁶ was blamed for the lack of clear guidelines on very topical issues, such as mixed marriages, marriage morality and *abortus provocatus*.

From the visitor’s reports, also based on the opinions gathered among the clergy, what clearly emerges are divergent views about the needs of the Scandinavian missions: contrary to the episcopate, Hanssen rejected the option of increasing the religious institutes, urging instead the intensification of those already existing, a ‘qualitative’ effort aimed at safeguarding the achieved results and at gaining visibility and influence among public opinion and in particular among intellectuals.

The interest in the Catholic Church is great, where it shows itself *up to date* [originally in English], as e.g., the apostolate of the Dominicans.⁴⁷

In this sense, the Jesuit and Dominican orders were the models to follow: they committed themselves more and with better results in the study of the local language and culture; thanks to their high level of

⁴⁴ Ap. Visit. Finland 1956, 279-80.

⁴⁵ Ap. Visit. Norway 1956, 21.

⁴⁶ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 99.

⁴⁷ Ap. Visit. Norway 1956, 52.

preparation, they could provide the missions with the so-called ‘specialised forces’, i.e. educated and trained priests, capable of guaranteeing the impulse for the necessary qualitative consolidation of the mission.

Hanssen’s notes on these religious orders are quite different from those – previously reported – related to male missionary congregations. In Norway, which needed “only priests who surpass mediocrity” and, possibly, exceed the level of preparation of the country’s Protestant priests, the Dominicans were a “bright point” in the diocese of Oslo as in the other missions of Scandinavia. Their apostolate was, according to Hanssen, “directly missionary and at a very high level”;⁴⁸ literary apostolate, lectures for Catholics and non-Catholics, education of converts; moreover, they maintained relations with the intellectuals of the University of Oslo and they managed the Catholic forum, a cycle of weekly lectures on theological and cultural topics.

New ideas, new methods, new forces and new relationships are of essential importance for the progress of the Church in Norway [...] where things go on, but nothing new happened.⁴⁹

For these reasons, Hanssen’s advice was to entrust the eight Dominicans with the training and the updating of the local clergy. Their convent was in fact considered more suitable for the ‘Norwegian initiation’ of the new missionaries (i.e., a period of study during which they were introduced to the language, culture and history of the country from a pastoral point of view) than the bishop’s residence, where this training was considered too superficial.

He suggested also to give them a parish in Oslo: without it, they were a little outside and above the clergy, “a kind of state within the state”;⁵⁰ at the same time, opening new parishes in the largest cities of Norway (Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger) would have contributed not to lose the families who moved to the suburbs. Certainly, this was a “less spectacular” solution than that proposed by Bishop Mangers, that is founding new stations all along the country, but according to Hanssen the results would have been more concrete.

In Helsinki, where they arrived in 1950, the three Dominicans represented “a great benefit”;⁵¹ they had a house with a chapel, a study centre and an open library, which served as a Catholic information point; they also organised lectures and edited the scientific journal *Documenta*. Whence the tensions between the monopoly of the priests

⁴⁸ Ap. Visit. Norway 1956, 19, 21.

⁴⁹ Ap. Visit. Norway 1956, 52.

⁵⁰ Ap. Visit. Norway 1956, 22.

⁵¹ Ap. Visit. Finland 1956, 272.

of the Sacred Heart – who, however, were unable to interact with intellectuals (“it is said that the Sacred Heart should not consider itself on the same cultural level as that of the Finnish intellectuals”)⁵² –, and the Dominicans who aspire to widen their range of action.

The Dominicans of the province of Paris, together with the Jesuits of the province of Cologne, were the most active orders in Sweden with very similar services: the parishes, the press apostolate, lectures, ecumenical circles, and the university apostolate (the Jesuits in Uppsala, the Dominicans in Lund).

The need to expand this type of ‘specialised apostolate’, already experienced by these two orders, was the first for importance among the key points of Hanssen’s reports for all the Scandinavian missions. He concluded that an increase in economic resources was certainly necessary, but it had to be allocated primarily to this field, as well as to the training of clergy able to face the challenges represented by these countries.

A strong direction was also necessary for the renewal of missionary work in Scandinavia. Although bishops and vicars had done a lot in the past for the growth of the Catholic Church, they were no longer able (with the sole exception of Wember) – due to age, character or health reasons – to guide their clergy with the necessary firmness towards well-defined objectives.

Consequently, in addition to the options already mentioned (for example, to entrust the Jesuits and Dominicans with more initiatives, even to the detriment of the other male religious congregations), Hanssen suggested the retirement of some bishops on the first useful occasion.

4 Conclusions

The analysis of the *relationes* together with that of the reports of the apostolic visitor Mons. Antoon Hanssen gives a quite exhaustive picture of the Catholic missions in Scandinavia in the 1950s. In contrast to the rather telegraphic *relationes*, the reports have provided important details for a more precise contextualisation, but also an alternative point of view that has highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the Catholic missionary work.

Simplifying, the apostolic visitor showed another side of this reality: while the episcopate attributed the slow progress of Catholicism in Scandinavia to economic difficulties (even if undeniable) and to a deep-rooted anti-Catholic prejudice that survived in the common conscience despite religious freedom (which, however, was only gradually and quite lately sanctioned), Hanssen highlighted the deficiencies

⁵² Ap. Visit. Finland 1956, 276.

(rather serious, when related to the knowledge of the local language) of a part of the missionary clergy.

This level of civilisation imposes methods and means different from those used among peoples of inferior civilisation.

This sentence, extracted from the previously mentioned letter by Father Goovart, summarises a common opinion that also emerges from other letters addressed to Propaganda Fide in those years: the Scandinavian countries represented a special testbed, which demanded a specialisation of the missionary effort, whence the objective difficulties of the clergy and the consequent slow progress of the Catholic Church in terms of conversions, local vocations etc.

This could also have been a plausible reason for Propaganda Fide to organise the apostolic visit in 1956.

The question is spontaneous: why did bishops and vicars omit such significant aspects in their *relationes*? The first consideration concerns the type of source: perhaps the 1922 questionnaire, as well as the *Prospectus status missionis*, were too rigid instruments, calibrated on the needs of different missionary contexts, to allow such particular dynamics to emerge.

Paradoxically, in these European missions the challenge was represented by a similar cultural, religious and theological context, which excluded the traditional superior-inferior relationship. While in non-European territories Catholicism's ability to penetrate was first due to the remarkable difference that the mission could make in terms of social development (education, health care, etc.), in the Scandinavian countries there was no possibility to make the difference in an already advanced welfare state, thus the penetration of Catholicism suffered from greater obstacles.

At the same time, the visitor's reports must be read with some caution for two reasons. First, there is the possibility that the missionaries have considered the visit a way through which convey their discontent directly to the Holy See, perhaps even at the cost of exacerbating certain problems (see the quite bad portraits of some bishops). Second, the visitor may have focused on certain aspects of the missionary apostolate (knowledge of the local language, the ordination of local clergy, etc.) stressing their deficiencies, following precisely the instructions of Propaganda Fide.

Understandably, bishops and vicars could have voluntarily omitted the critical issues they were aware of but that they could not manage: geographical distances made contacts (and control) with their clergy difficult; but from Hanssen's reports what emerges is also a sense of bishops' powerlessness facing religious orders and congregations that really enjoyed great autonomy, therefore free to persevere in more or less successful missionary practices.

The Catholic Church must always examine and re-examine its methods of spreading the faith. Not only the method, but also the content of the preaching must be considered against the background of the time and the country in which Christianity has to be introduced. [...] It is not a question of minimising the content of the faith, but of spreading it in its essence, well balanced in its entirety and in its details (Bonduelle O.P., *Essai sur la situation religieuse en Finlande*).

[...] Not all priests have the time to do it and the skills required. Unfortunately, as they say, everyone still follows their own way a little too much.⁵³

On the other hand, as this quote points out, a part of the clergy (and some congregations in particular) was really unable to understand the deficiencies of the missionary strategies, and consequently the need for a rethink, an 'update'. It did not seem to understand the different challenges represented by the Scandinavian missions for the Catholic forces: not only to convert and expand the Church according to the ecclesiocentric concept of *plantatio ecclesiae*, but also the need for a cultural adaptation of the Gospel, the so-called 'inculturation' as theorised by Second Vatican Council, even in an already Christian and European context.

He [Suhr] is purely Danish; he wants to be Danish with the Danes and [...] he only approves what he considers appropriate for the Danes and what they feel as Danish. Those who, like the German Jesuits and the French Dominicans, think forward, agree with him on this point.⁵⁴

In conclusion, as previously anticipated, from an overall analysis of the sources, what emerges is a latent contrast between two different approaches: one 'conservative', tied to traditional missionary practices, calibrated on non-Christian realities (as emerges from the vocabulary used), and to the intransigent anti-Protestant controversy; whence the tendency to ascribe the slow progress of Catholicism to some leitmotifs such as the availability of financial resources and the growing religious indifferentism as a consequence of a long chain of errors that had its origin in the Reformation.

The other approach instead was more oriented towards an 'update', as an effort to master the local language and culture to the advantage of an effective apostolate, with a consequence emphasis on the need to improve the quality of the missionary commitment, also

⁵³ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 135.

⁵⁴ Ap. Visit. Denmark 1956, 97.

in terms of the clergy's competence, while less disposed to consider the issue in terms of doctrinal superiority or of conversion to the 'true' church. The challenge was to respond to the growing phenomenon of religious indifferentism, not as a mere consequence of Protestant neo-paganism, but as an aspect of modernity and of the consequent transformation of Western society, according to the warning given (not surprisingly) by the Jesuits some years later: "Europe: a land of mission!"⁵⁵

Although this approach had an undoubted influence on the Second Vatican Council both in the missionary sphere and in that of relations with other Christian churches, the Catholic Church in Scandinavia is still a minority, and some difficulties have not been overcome.⁵⁶

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⁵⁵ Forno, *La cultura degli altri*, 159.

⁵⁶ Pope Benedict XVI (2010). *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Scandinavian Bishops Conference on their 'ad limina' visit*. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100325_scandinavia.html.

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The US Catholic Church after World War II: Reflections on the *relationes ad limina* (1949-54)

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Abstract The article analyses the content of the *relationes ad limina* submitted to the Vatican by US bishops between 1949 and 1954. These documents shed light on the episcopate's views and actions during the second post-war period, emphasising the growth of the US Catholic Church and its gradual advance within the US society as a relevant religious force. The US bishops' main concerns appear to be secularism (or indifferentism), their competitive relationship with Protestant denominations, the educational system, and the use of new media, such as radio and television. The racial question also emerged.

Keywords Catholic Church. US Catholicism. Pius XII. Relatio ad limina. US dioceses.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Historical Overview. – 3 The US *relationes ad limina* (1949-54). – 3.1 Protestantism and Materialism. – 3.2 Catholic Education. – 3.3 The Use of the Media. – 3.4 The Racial Question. – 4 Conclusions.



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1 Introduction

The pontificate of Pius XII (1939-1958) represented a turning point in the history of the relations between the Holy See and the United States of America.¹ For the most part, recent historical scholarship has chiefly highlighted its diplomatic and ideological aspects, emphasising with varying nuances how the rapprochement between two ‘powers’ – a moral one, the Holy See, and a cultural, political, economic and military one, the United States – was largely due to the geopolitical situation of the second post-war period and the beginning of the Cold War. For example, Philippe Chenaux argues the existence of this strong convergence and sums it up in three points: the search for a just and lasting peace (1942-46), the need to defend the West against communism (1947-51), and the building of a united Europe (1952-57).² Differently, American scholars such as John T. McGreevy or Leslie W. Tentler focuses more on the American side of the story, debating both the developing Catholic and the developing American identity of US Catholicism, showing how deeply Catholics influenced American society and speaking about a ‘public Catholicism’ in the post-war era.³

Historiography has confirmed the establishment and dynamics of this somehow ‘privileged’ relationship between the Vatican and the United States during the Pacellian pontificate.⁴ However, the specific resource of *relations ad limina* underlying the present essay can add an inside look at US Catholicism, partly confirming developments already known, but, more importantly, restoring, almost bringing to life again, the direct voices of the US bishops and their views on the management of the local churches after World War II.⁵ In fact, previous scholarship has neglected this documentation as a valuable tool to study the US episcopate and its worldview in its relationship with the Vatican.

This article aims to contribute to the major thesis that Catholics moved into the American political, cultural and social mainstream in the 1930s and especially 1940s, becoming an effective force in the

¹ Historiography has already explored several aspects, especially the diplomatic ones: Regoli, “La diplomazia papale: un percorso storiografico”. See also, Chenaux, “Il Vaticano, gli Stati Uniti e l’Europa”. For a broader view of post-war America see Carnes, *The Columbia History of Post-World War II America*.

² Chenaux, “Il Vaticano, gli Stati Uniti e l’Europa”, 65-6.

³ McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, particularly chs. 6-7; Tentler, *American Catholics*, particularly chs. 11-12.

⁴ Di Nolfo, *Vaticano e Stati Uniti*; Castagna, *Un ponte oltre l’oceano*; D’Alessio, “The United States and the Vatican”. See also Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*.

⁵ The quinquennial visit *ad limina* is the required visit of diocesan bishops to Rome, to meet the pope and to report on the state of their dioceses via a detailed questionnaire. See Ricciardi Celsi, *Le ‘relations ad limina’: aspetti della esperienza storica*, and Menozzi, “L’utilizzazione delle ‘relations ad limina’ nella storiografia”.

public arena in the 1950s. The US Catholic answer to this change was often anguished and definitely complex. Some sought to retain the insularity of the old Catholic ghetto and subculture, for it provided an easy lineup of ideological and confessional enemies. Others, however, sought assimilation, even overcompensating by boasting of their patriotism and ideological fervour in combating national foes, especially those on the left. McCarthyism, named after the Catholic Senator from Wisconsin, has often been interpreted in precisely this light. Cardinal Francis J. Spellman, a prominent figure in this era, operated in this vein as well. These two responses were never mutually exclusive, and US bishops' voices from the *relationes ad limina* need to be seen in this precise context.

Both church leaders and longtime confessional adversaries, mostly Protestant, were forced to adapt to this new situation. From a US Protestant perspective, it was precisely this convergence of Catholicism with the American political, cultural and social mainstream which caused such consternation in Protestant ranks, particularly among liberal Protestants who saw the official pronouncements of Catholic bishops, as analysed below, against materialism and secularism as a particular threat. Protestant leaders perceived Franco's Spain and the success of Christian Democracy in the Italian elections of 1948, along with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's appointment of Myron Taylor as 'personal envoy' to Pope Pius XII and the large Catholic presence in the New Deal coalition (just to mention a few examples) as attempts by the Catholic Church to weaken the separation of church and state, a key component of United States legal thinking since the country's origin. This recurring tension between US Catholics and Protestants is another element that the *relationes ad limina* clearly show.

A general historical overview of US Catholicism in the period will be followed by an analysis of a few relevant themes that emerged from a selected sample of *relationes ad limina* between 1949 and 1954, the post-war timeframe recently made available for consultation at the Vatican Apostolic Archives. From a methodological point of view, since it was impossible to analyse the *relationes ad limina* of all US dioceses because of their large number (121 in total), a sample was chosen that was representative on the one hand, in terms of the diverse geography of the country (in order to cover as much territory as possible), and on the other hand, for historical relevance (priority was given to the most important dioceses in terms of size and influence, namely the urban dioceses of the Northeast and Midwest of the country).⁶ In

⁶ After World War II, the East Coast dioceses retained a primatial position, including the diocese of Washington, D.C., created in 1947, and the diocese of Chicago in the Midwest. The Catholic presence in areas such as Oklahoma (*relationes* of Oklahoma

examining this documentation, common issues appeared along with regional specificities within a shared understanding of the situations that US bishops faced, suggesting a sort of cause-effect narrative of what American Catholicism experienced in that period.

2 Historical Overview

US Catholicism experienced an extraordinary expansion after World War II, mostly due to the economic prosperity that the entire country enjoyed beginning in the second half of the 1940s. In the period between 1945 and 1965 there was a 90 per cent increase in the number of Catholics in the country, from 23.8 million to 45.6 million, due both to a population boom and also, though to a lesser extent, to conversions. The number of bishops grew by 58 per cent, clergy by 52 per cent, women religious by 30 per cent, and seminarians by 127 per cent.⁷ This increase was also visible in the wider utilisation of the country's physical space through the construction of new churches, schools, hospitals: for example, there were 123 new hospitals run by Catholic agencies, 3,005 new schools, from elementary to high schools, and 94 new colleges. Consequently, the enrolment of Catholics in the educational system up through the highest levels also mushroomed: the increase was 3.1 million, more than 120 per cent in total, and it was around 300 per cent at colleges and universities.⁸ However, it should be noted that no more than 50 per cent of the Catholic population had access to higher education.⁹ These numbers tell us not only of an increased geographical advance but also of cultural, social and political advances on the part of US Catholics, who were emerging in US society no longer as a religious minority, but as a majority group, which was able to carry its own weight in terms of producing an alternative culture to the historic Protestant one.¹⁰

and Tulsa) or Georgia (*relatio* of Savannah-Atlanta) was smaller and so was the influence of the local Catholic Church. As few examples: in Tulsa there were 73,186 Catholics out of 2,336,434; in Savannah 28,994 out of 3,250,000 (in 1950); whereas in New York 1,260,328 out of 4,900,000 and in Boston 1,283,232 out of 2,934,548.

⁷ Statistical data from Carey, *Catholics in America*, 93 (taken from the *Official Catholic Directory* from 1945 to 1965).

⁸ From 92,426 to 384,526, mostly due to the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the 'GI Bill', a law that provided a number of concrete aids to war veterans, in particular giving subsidies to families to pay for universities, graduate schools and training programs. The relative low cost of Catholic education at that time was also another factor. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 93; Tentler, *American Catholics*, 280.

⁹ Carey, *Catholics in America*, 94.

¹⁰ Already in the last decade of the nineteenth and, to a much greater extent, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Catholics were the country's second-largest religious group (and as Christians they even belonged to the largest religious group alto-

From the pastoral letters of the US episcopal magisterium of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s emerged the urgency of the reconstruction of Christian culture in the United States and the Western world through various means, including veritable moral crusades against two historical evils identified by the episcopal hierarchy as the most pernicious: communism and secularism.¹¹ The damage caused by these two 'dangers' could be seen in the context of the family (divorce, abortion, and birth control causing disunity and instability), in the public entertainment industry (materialism and sexual promiscuity), in public education (through disconnection from religious values), in the economic order (*laissez faire* on the one hand and totalitarian socialism on the other), in the American courts that legislated without regard to religious values, and finally even in the political order, where natural law was not assumed, nor even contemplated.

This was the period in which the US Catholic Church – as the revival churches had already done and as the fledgling neo-evangelical group headed by Billy Graham was doing at the time – pointed confidently to an ideal link between America and Christianity, and particularly between America and Catholicism, which legitimised cultural and social interventions such as the crusades against the immorality of the modern entertainment and literature industries or a strong media presence through radio and television programs, or even the battle for Catholic schools. This last aspect was relevant not only because it represented a North American specificity, but also because it characterised the very model of US Catholicism. As a matter of fact, the creation of first-level (elementary and middle) schools in every parish or group of parishes underlined an ecclesiastical strategy of evangelisation – within a society that was strongly religiously competitive on the one hand, but also strongly a-religious on the other – in the organization of a public education system, which conceived education as a fundamental place from which to re-Christianise the country and strengthen the ranks of the Catholic Church.

While in the 1920s and 1930s the bishops opposed federal aid for public schools because they feared increased state power, from 1944 onward they supported federal aid for Catholic schools, particularly in depressed and poor areas, reversing the trend and becoming the promoters of a campaign with political features that several Protes-

gether). Although the concept of minority is used in several Catholic sources and literature, it is quite controversial, particularly because the basic definition of 'minority' refers to any group that constitutes less than 50 per cent of the total population. Certainly, 'minority' is not only a statistical question. Here I use the term 'minority' in a loose, non-technical manner.

¹¹ Carey, *Catholics in America*, 93-114; Chinnici, *American Catholicism Transformed*, 28-35. See also the pastoral letters of the US bishops of this period in Nolan, *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops*.

tant churches perceived as an attack on the legislative principle of separation of church and state.¹²

The greater economic advances of US Catholics, who moved out of ethnic enclaves to become citizens of the upper and middle classes, also gave rise to numerous associations, both religious and lay, capable of raising funds and supporting missionary, charitable, and cultural action projects (an example was the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (SPF) under Fulton Sheen's direction between 1950 to 1966, which became a national force within US dioceses). This phenomenon also involved a process of suburbanisation/pluralisation that represented a driving force able to deeply modify Catholicism in the United States.

In connection with the already mentioned cultural, political, and economic factors was racial segregation. In the southern United States, it was a *de jure* situation, but black Catholics in the north experienced a *de facto* segregation as well when they were separated into parishes and schools intended only for them.¹³ There were attempts among the Catholic laity to effect change. Both the Southeastern Regional Interracial Commission (SERINCO) and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) worked to eradicate legalised southern racism, but with limited success. Mostly, the church hierarchy remained silent on racial issues during these decades, thus contributing to an atmosphere of systematic discrimination. In Chicago, Cardinal Mundelein implemented a policy of effective segregation beginning in 1919 that continued until the 1950s, while Joseph Elmer Ritter in St. Louis, Missouri, and O'Boyle in New York desegregated their dioceses in 1947 and 1948 respectively, albeit amid protests. All the other dioceses desegregated only after 1954, the year of the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, and it was not until 1958, after the formation of the US Commission on Civil Rights (CCR) that the bishops published a pastoral letter dedicated to the issue of religion and race (*Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, on 14 November 1958).¹⁴

3 The US *relationes ad limina* (1949-54)

The analysed *relationes ad limina* fit into this historical context. Any understanding of the growth of the Catholic Church in the United States has to take into account the fact that the US is a very large, heteroge-

¹² See, for example, Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*.

¹³ Suffice is to think about the journalist book written by John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* in 1961.

¹⁴ Nolan, *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops*, 201-6. See Carey, *Catholics in America*, 106-8 and Chinnici, *American Catholicism Transformed*, 84-104.

neous ecclesiastical territory, with substantial differences not only geographically – larger dioceses and smaller dioceses, urban dioceses and rural dioceses – but also economically, socially and, above all, religiously. In fact, the Catholic presence has developed in very different ways among the various geographical, economic and social areas.¹⁵ Considering that, the analysis of the *relatio ad limina* source illuminates more vividly and confirms that the Catholic Church overall was thriving, and in some cases booming, in the country in the post-war period, as witnessed by the construction of new churches, seminaries and parochial schools, the many donations for good works, the growing number of lay associations for the evangelisation of different social sectors, and priestly and religious vocations. We see a Catholic Church that occupies more and more space within the social, political, and also economic landscape of the nation, especially in the East Coast (for example, Washington, D.C., New York, Philadelphia, Boston). The documentation confirms the extension of the era of ‘triumph’ for Catholic education in the country, the consequent formation of a strong Catholic intellectual leadership and the definitive move ‘from the margins to the centre’ from a social, cultural and political point of view.¹⁶

The most influential dioceses were also ruled by prominent figures in US Catholicism at the time, with some visibility even outside Catholic and US borders: Cardinal Samuel A. Stritch (1887-1958) in Chicago, Cardinal Francis J. Spellman (1889-1967) in New York, Cardinal Patrick A. O’Boyle (1947-1973) in Washington, D.C., and Cardinal Richard J. Cushing (1944-1970) in Boston. This is certainly relevant given the fact that the country held no Catholic majority, preserved the tradition of more or less latent tensions between Christian denominations, and had been based since its foundation on the separation of state and churches. Thus, it proclaimed itself a-religious, in a way foreign to the European tradition and certainly not desired by the Catholic magisterium of the time.¹⁷

From the consulted *relationes ad limina* common themes that cut across geography and history have emerged: 1. the relationship with the Protestant world (i.e., Catholicism vs. Protestantism); 2. secularism (also identified as indifferentism, materialism, liberalism, or even ‘material humanism’); 3. the role of Catholic education; 4. the use of modern media: radio and television; 5. the racial question (i.e., the management of black communities; black people are called *nigritae* or *nigritas* in Latin and, at that time, *nigriti* in Italian).

¹⁵ See the digital map here: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Media/index.html?apwid=8d8afe7a04db4a14ad48c1a841012cfd>.

¹⁶ Tentler, *American Catholics*, 266-82.

¹⁷ Think about the Jesuit John Courtney Murray’s vision in “Religious Liberty: The Concern of All”, among his many other writings on this topic.

3.1 Protestantism and Materialism

In a number of *relationes ad limina*, the Catholic relationship with Protestants and with indifferentism/secularism are often seen through the same lens and are perceived as closely related. In the view of US Catholic bishops, secularism is often rooted in the “Protestant heresy”, or, in other words, the Protestant vision is the bearer of religious indifferentism and a dangerous secularism that unfortunately influences American Catholics as they are continually exposed to it as a minority presence. The attitude toward Protestantism is one of strong criticism, using a fully pre-conciliar language and conceptualisation: it is a heresy that dangerously influences faithful Catholics, who must resist it at all costs. As will be seen below, the US bishops advocate Catholic religious education as part of the solution, for only through a primary and secondary school education that takes Catholic values into account can the influence of Protestants and secularised society be stemmed.

An example of this worldview is seen in the questionnaire answer number 100,¹⁸ sent in 1949 by the Cardinal Stritch of Chicago (1887-1958):¹⁹

Errors and Dangers: As is well known in these places, material humanism affects the minds and hearts of many more widely and more broadly. Social institutions are debilitated by secularism and souls are in ruins. Indeed, life itself is governed for many by materialism and falls into confusion either by atheism or agnosticism. The majority of non-Catholics profess God and worship Christ with confused minds, but in practice do not recognise religion as the ruling power in life. The greatest confusion prevails among Protestants, and they are the ones who act just as strongly against the Church. Pernicious errors are not uncommon in public newspapers and journals. Although Communism counts few means to spread nefarious direct and indirect propaganda, it fights against the Church.²⁰

¹⁸ On the questionnaire see the Editorial of this special issue. Question no. 100 is the last and only open question.

¹⁹ From 1930 to 1939 Samuel Alphonsus Stritch served as archbishop of Milwaukee. Upon the death of Cardinal George Mundelein of Chicago, Stritch was appointed his successor in March 1940. He remained in Chicago until 1946. In March 1958 he was appointed pro-prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, becoming the first American cardinal to be entrusted with the leadership of a congregation of the Roman Curia. He died in Rome on 26 May 1958, before assuming his duties. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20080518020950/http://www.archmil.org/bishops/Bishop-Stritch.asp>. On Catholicism in Chicago see Avella, *This Confident Church*.

²⁰ Chicago 1949, 100: “Errores et pericula: Uti notum est his in locis humanismus materialis latius latiusque mentes et corda multorum capit. Instituta socialia saecularismus debilitantur et in ruinam animarum vertuntur. Imo apud multos ipsa

Interestingly, the expression “material humanism” (also translated as “secular humanism”) becomes a container in which to place nearly all the “errors and dangers” that the cardinal fears: atheism, agnosticism, secularism, communism, and Protestantism, thus bringing into alignment the whole genealogy of modern errors conceived by intransigent Catholic thought.²¹

A more articulate discourse is found in the thought of Cardinal Spellman (1889-1967), archbishop of New York, who was an exponent of Catholic conservatism, a supporter of the foreign policy of the US government of the time, and a figure close to Eugenio Pacelli – with whom he had worked in Rome between 1925 and 1932, before being appointed archbishop of New York in 1939.²² In the analysis of his ecclesiological and pastoral vision, he reiterated anti-Semitic language in his pairing of a Jewish rabbi and a Protestant pastor who both seduce Catholics with erroneous doctrines – “sectae Protestanticae his affectae sunt pestibus et complures, ministri protestantici et rabbi iudaici ita seducti sunt ut ipsi loquacissimi propugnatores facti sunt illarum formidolosissimarum doctrinarum” (Protestant sects were affected by these plagues, and several Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis were so deceived that they themselves became the most eloquent champions of those most frightening doctrines).²³ He also includes with them issues related to the traditional family (and its disintegration) and broader biopolitical issues (divorce and euthanasia). In the archdioceses of Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., and Detroit, abortion and onanism also emerged. Spellman described in detail the work of the Catholic Church as the sole champion in the country’s religious landscape against divorce and against euthanasia, particularly against the Euthanasia Society of America, which in the 1940s was pushing for legislation to allow voluntary euthanasia under certain conditions.²⁴

vita materialismo regitur et sive atheismo sive agnosticismo in confusionem cadit. Major pars acatholicorum Deum profitentur et etiam confusis mentibus Christum adorant sed de facto religio tanquam dominantem vitae potentiam practice non recognoscunt. Inter protestantes maxima confusion obtinet et sunt ii qui contra Ecclesia pro viribus agunt. Apud diaria publica et in ephemeridibus perniciosi errores non raro divulgantur. Licet Communismus paucos numerat ope nefariae propagandae directe et indirecte contra Ecclesiam dimicat”. All translations from Latin in the text are by the Author.

²¹ Along the same lines was Bishop John Joseph Mitty’s 1954 *relatio*: “grave errors such as liberalism and Protestantism” (San Francisco 1954, 69).

²² Biographical notes on Spellman in Carey, *Catholics in America*, 236-7.

²³ New York 1949, 16.

²⁴ New York 1949, 16. The congregation note to the 1949 Kansas City *relatio ad limina* is also given on divorce: “La diocesi però è una di quelle che sembra sia servita al Delegato apostolico come esempio, quando stendeva il suo rapporto, e diceva che nelle diocesi americane degli Stati Uniti non si predicherà mai abbastanza contro il divorzio che dagli acattolici pare stia per passare anche ai cattolici non infrequentemente” (Kansas City-St. Joseph 1949; originally in Italian) (However, the diocese is one of those that seems

A broader overview helps us put this concern into context. The Euthanasia Society of America (ESA) was founded in New York in 1938 with the goal of gaining social and legal acceptance of the ‘right’ to kill certain human beings (people whom the social organisation called “mentally deficient” or “incurable”). In 1939 the ESA attempted to legalise euthanasia through a legislative proposal for ‘voluntary’ euthanasia, but it failed.²⁵ In the beginning, the euthanasia movement grew out of eugenic assumptions, rather than the concept of free choice. It was also partially related to the Planned Parenthood Association of America (PPFA), founded in 1916 by Margaret Sanger as the American Birth Control League (in 1942 it became PPFA) to promote birth control in the United States. In Brooklyn, New York, Sanger had also opened the first contraception clinic.²⁶ In fact, it would be a group of members of the American Eugenics Society and members of the American Birth Control League who formed the ESA.

Here it is interesting to note how the archbishop first tied the two issues, euthanasia and divorce, together as part of a single project intent on demolishing Christian morality, but we also note his emphasis that the Catholic Church alone stood firmly against such ‘dangers’. Aside from any rhetoric, it is from these years onward that the US Church was to make biopolitical issues a strong identity aspect, especially for the more conservative Catholics: against contraception (permitted by several Protestant denominations), against abortion (permitted under certain circumstances in several Protestant denominations), against any form of attack on the traditional family, such as divorce (permitted by the majority of Protestant denominations).

The development of an American Catholic identity is a perennial theme. The evolution of the Catholic identity in contrast to Protestantism, or better, within a composite Protestant land, is a phenomenon that had occurred since the origin of the country (as it had throughout the nineteenth century in several European countries),²⁷ and that the development had created peculiar forms (Americanism is the most well-known example).²⁸ In the second half of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church in the United States assumed an identity of its own, being no longer a mere recipient of inputs from Rome and Europe but also itself a key global and powerful actor. The new public visibility achieved by the US Church, the convergence with

to have served the Apostolic Delegate as an example when he drew up his report, and said that the American dioceses in the United States will never preach enough against divorce which from non-Catholics not infrequently seems to pass also to Catholics).

²⁵ See <https://all.org/euthanasia/euthanasia-history>.

²⁶ See Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn*, 10–38; Baker, *Margaret Sanger*, part. 127–58.

²⁷ Most notably in Germany. See Blaschke, *Konfessionen im Konflikt*.

²⁸ Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*.

the US government and the geopolitical stance of the Vatican in the post-war period all influenced this process: the strong anticommunist attitude is just the most public example. Just as the conservative political and religious forces converged on biopolitical issues at the beginning of the 1970s – think of the Moral Majority –, yet another new aspect of the US Catholic identity was added to the already complex scenario, while still drawing on forces already present in the immediate post-war period, as the *relationes* clearly show.

Spellman is only one prominent example of the pervasive world-view shared by other national episcopates of the time, and the magisterium as well: that of a Catholic Church under attack by “liberal” and “emancipated” enemy forces. These forces were making inroads because of people’s indifferentism, and even included references – which in 1949 appeared unfortunate given the tragic events of World War II – to the so-called Jewish-Protestant “powers”:

In the absence of firm dogma and no present leadership capable of exercising authority, the powers of Protestants and Jews became powerless to recruit and guide their faithful, or to oppose the impulse of religious indifferentism and moral inertia of any kind. It is not uncommon for their leaders to form the vanguard of the enemy, exchanging ‘liberal’ and ‘emancipated’ ideas with each other. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of them, aware of these damaging things, skilled and bold, deprived of a sense of justice, as well as deprived of a healthy example of good behaviour, reject all moral restraint in their daily lives and descend to the lowest level of deterioration. Clear and manifest evidence of this destructive doctrine appears in abundance in almost every secular newspaper edition. However, it is not only the number and frequent repetition of those crimes that strike a sensitive spectator; but the manner in which these things are received by the people, who seem indifferent, strikes us with great apprehension.²⁹

²⁹ New York 1949, 84: “Deficiente qualicum stabili dogmate et duce non praesente, qui auctoritatem exercere posset, potestates Protestantismi et Iudaismi factae sunt impotentes ad conducendos et dirigendos suos fideles vel ad opponendam impetui indifferentismi religiosi et inertiae moralis qualemcumque ordinatam resistentiam. Non rare ipsi eorum duces primas acies inimicorum efformant, inter se ipsos in jactandis “liberalibus” et “emancipates” ideis aemulantes. Quam ob rem nihil mirum est, ut multi eorum, conscientia hisce nocuis notionibus obtuse, peritis et audacibus ad assequendam iustitiam ducibus orbat, necnon salubri boni exempli effectum privati, omnem morale moderationem in eorum vita cotidiana reiciant et ad infimam depravationem corruant. Huius perniciosae doctrinae indicia conspicua manifesta in omni fere editione ephemeridum saecularium abundanter apparent. Attamen non solum numerus et frequens repetitio horum criminum spectatorem sensibilem percutiunt; sed indifferens apparetur modus, quo a populo haec recipiuntur, nobis magnum metum incutit”.

Such an adverse position against modern society undoubtedly would have found good ears in the Vatican, since it was expressed in different ways by Pope Pius XII himself.

3.2 Catholic Education

Another relevant theme that emerges from the *relationes ad limina* is that of the importance of Catholic education, a decisive issue in the debate between church and state in the United States ever since the nation's origins. The US bishops perceived schools as an indispensable battleground. Once the possibility of receiving public funds or incorporating religious teachings into public schools was shelved, the Catholic hierarchy opted for the erection of parochial elementary and middle schools and later Catholic high schools and colleges.

The 1950s were the decade of the greatest expansion of Catholic schools, which would then bring about in the 1960s the remarkable growth in the level of education of US Catholics and their repositioning at higher social levels. All the consulted *relationes ad limina* report the establishment of new parochial schools, which never seem to be sufficient in number, and almost all of them stress their strategic importance.

However, a phenomenon that would have enormous repercussions in more recent times was already looming: the need to have members of religious congregations available for teaching, usually members of women's congregations, who were able to teach in schools at a lower cost than what was needed to pay lay staff.³⁰ In fact, in the post-conciliar years, when female religious vocations drastically decreased, the parish-based schools entered a severe economic crisis, and the entire system that had been deliberately formulated in the 1940s and 1950s started to weaken. Archbishop Stritch of Chicago thus testified in 1954:

Although schools have been provided in the best way, new and larger ones are needed and required. The number of religious teachers does not fulfil the needs for teachers, and therefore Catholic lay teachers are called upon to assist. The burden of paying the salaries of these lay people is truly severe and in some cases almost insurmountable. Add the enormous amount of money needed these days for the construction of new schools. This is the greatest difficulty. Without Catholic schools among us, children are exposed to serious dangers. It must be said that so far this situation is going very well, with the cooperation of the faithful, but we pray the Blessed Virgin for the future that the number of reli-

³⁰ Brian, *Into Silence and Servitude*, ch. 1.

gious vocations will grow and that there will be new schools and additions for the schools already in place. The number of students in our schools is increasing year by year.³¹

Archbishop Cushing of Boston also repeatedly spoke of the need for educational resources.³² He was known, in fact, for his effective fund-raising aimed at financing education, charitable works and missions, and was particularly appreciated in Roman circles for his “great work in schools and churches”.³³ In his diocese in 1954 he noted how nearly half of Catholic children attended Catholic schools and how the schools attracted more and more students because of their increasingly high quality of education. In proposing Catholic education, whether by Catholic schools – the preferred solution – or provided by Catholic teachers enrolled in public schools (not to teach catechism, though), Cushing stresses its importance as a remedy for secularism: “est quaestio quae solvenda est solummodo per augmentum continuatum in spritualitae, praedicatione et in diffusionem doctrinae spiritualis” (is [was] a problem which must be solved only by a continuous increase in spirituality, preaching and dissemination of spiritual doctrine).³⁴

We can also glimpse between the lines the change in US society’s perceptions of Catholics during this period – “ex mutatione in mente eorum officialium” (change in the mentality of (governmental) officials).³⁵ All were aware of the gradual waning of suspicion and mistrust toward a church that until recently had been perceived as a minority, as belonging to the economically disadvantaged social strata, and as foreign to American culture.

³¹ Chicago 1954, 100: “Licet pro viribus scholae provisae sunt, novae et ampliores requiruntur et requiruntur. Numerus docentium religiosarum necessitatibus non est par ideoque docentes laicae catholicae in adiutorium vocantur. Onus solvendi stipendia horum laicorum vere grave est et in quibusdam casibus ferme insuperabile. Addatur ingens summa pecuniarum his diebus necessaria pro aedificandis novis scholis. Est difficultas maxima. Sine scholis catholicis apud nos. pueruli gravibus periculis exponuntur. Dicatur hucusque haec res cum cooperatione fidelium optime progreditur sed pro futuro Beatam Virginem precamus ut vocationes religiosas numero crescent et media pro novis scholis et additamentis pro scholis iam erectis proveniant. Numerus discentium in nostris scholis de anno in annum crescit”.

³² Richard James Cushing served as archbishop of Boston from 1944 to 1970 and he was made a cardinal in 1958. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 197.

³³ Congregation note, Boston 1954: “molte nuove sia chiese sia scuole. Metà dei ragazzi vanno nelle scuole cattoliche. Per gli altri, è stata fatta una convenzione con l’autorità civile affinché nei giorni e nelle ore di vacanza possano assistere al catechismo in chiesa (90,100)” (originally in Italian).

³⁴ Boston 1954, 100.

³⁵ Boston 1954, 100.

3.3 The Use of the Media

The convergence of Catholicism with the values of American society, or, better, the “Americanization” of the Catholic Church, can also be seen in the early use, compared to other local churches, of “modern” media to evangelise more effectively. Radio and television were on several occasions mentioned as useful tools for spreading the Catholic message.³⁶

In 1954, Archbishop Spellman in New York mentioned, though only briefly, Fulton Sheen, who for two decades, from 1930 to 1950, hosted the popular evening radio program *The Catholic Hour* for the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), later moving to television with *Life Is Worth Living* (1951-1957) and *The Fulton Sheen Show* (1961-1968).³⁷ The faithful who “versantur inter materialismum qui his temporibus proprius est tamquam viridis oasis christianae virtutis et amoris” (live[ed] in the midst of materialism, which in recent times is [was] considered a green oasis of Christian virtue and love), found “lucem, solatium in eius verbis reperierunt” (light and comfort in his words):

It is difficult to estimate how much good this series [Sheen’s programs] has already accomplished or will have, but forecasters agree that it will contribute greatly to religion and serious thinking. In order to make the best use of these means, it seemed appropriate to entrust a priest with a special task of organizing our broadcasting and telecommunications services. To these the priest prepares and shows the things we wish to do by means of these arts, and consults with the Catholic television and radio stations themselves. They have been strongly influenced by these arts.³⁸

³⁶ As examples, Boston 1954, 100; New York 1954, 100.

³⁷ Bibliographical notes on Fulton Sheen in Carey, *Catholics in America*, 233-4. See also Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 82-101.

³⁸ New York 1954, 100. “In rebus moralibus et spiritualibus fideles esse securiores videntur. Versantur inter materialismum qui his temporibus proprius est tamquam viridis oasis christianae virtutis et amoris. Frequentius autem viri prudentes uniuscuiusque religionis confitentur Dominum et Onnipotentiam Dei, et semper plures cives studium et operam ad res religiosas convertunt. Optime ominari possumus ex eo quod magis ad religiosa argumenta attenditur in potentissimis et mediis radiophonii et teleoramatis. Abhinc biennio Reverendissimus Dominus Fulton Sheen, Episcopus Auxiliaris noster, seriem contionum per teleorama habuit quae libentissime exaudita sunt fructusque multos religioni attulerunt. Illum multa decies centena milia et nullius et cuiuscumque religionis per hebdomadas audiunt, et instructionem, lucem, solatium in eius verbis reperierunt. Quantum boni hac serie iam evenerit vel proventura sit difficile est aestimare, sed omina consentiunt eam religioni et gravi cogitationi summopere prodesse. Eisdem mediis ut plenissime utamur providum nobis visum est sacerdotem operi speciali Archiocesano praeponere qui actus nostros radiophonicos et teleoramaticos ordinaret. His sacerdos ea quae per has artes facere volumus parat et exhibet, nec non ipsis societatibus radiophonicis et teleoramaticis de rebus catholicis consulit. Magni adducti sunt ut ad has artes sese conferant”.

It is clear that there is a growing awareness of the potential of such tools and also a strategy not to leave their use to whim or chance. Certainly, coexistence alongside other Protestant churches, which had already been using radio and television for some time – one thinks of Billy Graham and the hundreds of local radio stations broadcasting Sunday morning Protestant services – had also been a catalyst of no small importance. However, the use of such new media, which were more prevalent in the more urbanised and industrialised parts of the country, should not be generalised. As an example, in the diocese of Savannah in the 1950s, evangelisation by mail was still being used: “corsi di catechismo ‘postali’ per cui il maestro manda in scritto ai lontani la spiegazione e il discepolo risponde in scritto le sue osservazioni (84)” (postal catechism courses whereby the teacher sends the explanation in writing to remote people and the student responds by writing his remarks (84)).³⁹

3.4 The Racial Question

Another issue, already partly studied by historiography,⁴⁰ that emerges from a relatively few *relationes ad limina*⁴¹ is the “questione nigritae” or racial question. The date that arguably represented a turning point in this issue was 1954, the year of the aforementioned Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, which has been described as the moment that galvanised the modern civil rights movement. After years of protests, led initially by black students and their parents at Molton High School in Virginia, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed five lawsuits challenging the *de jure* segregated school system nationwide; these lawsuits were later combined in what is known as *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional. Thus, any mention of the so-called *nigritae* prior to 1954 chiefly demonstrates a rather traditional view, namely, that of a white missionary attitude toward African American communities, similar to the attitude of the time toward other indigenous peoples such as the Native Americans, and, in fact, describes a parish-wide system of segregation. The diocese of Savannah is a case in point.

³⁹ Congregation note, Savannah 1954.

⁴⁰ See Davis, *The History of Black Catholics*; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*; Anderson, *Black, White, and Catholic*; Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*; Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic*; Johnson, *One in Christ*; Newman, *Desegregating Dixie*; Pasquier, “Catholicism and Race”.

⁴¹ New York 1954; Washington, D.C. 1954; Chicago 1954; Savannah 1954.

Bishop Gerald Patrick A. O'Hara (1895-1963)⁴² in his 1954 *relatio ad limina* mentioned a parish created for a black community, thus taking for granted the *de jure* segregation that existed within his diocese, if not the common mindset of considering black people inferior human beings. The typewritten note in Italian summarizing the *relatio* says "per i Nigriti, che da alcuni sono stimati quasi razza inferiore, [il vescovo] ha istituito anche un ospedale" (for the 'nigriti', who are considered by some as almost an inferior race, he also established a hospital).⁴³

However, we see something different in the first *relatio ad limina* of the newly formed (1948) diocese of Washington, D.C. In 1954, Archbishop O'Boyle (1896-1987)⁴⁴ was taken to point out that, in the Catholic schools of his diocese, black boys and girls were accepted. What is more, he added, not without some pride, this same attitude was then practised, following the example of the Catholics, even in public schools by government decree.⁴⁵ He also asserted:

When it was recently decreed by the Supreme Court that 'segregation', which selects children in public schools on the basis of their colour, is against the law, many black men flocked here. On the other hand, many of the Caucasian ancestors moved to Maryland and Virginia counties, where so far few blacks can be found. Years ago, in 1948, the Ordinary, so to speak, outdid the Supreme Court's decree and directed that in the future no discrimination should be made, regardless of colour of the archdiocese's elementary schoolchildren. [...] The Catholic University of America has been accepting blacks since 1935. When the Supreme Court decree was promulgated in May last month, all the secular newspapers praised the Church because the Catholic Church had been admitting blacks to its schools for some years.⁴⁶

⁴² Biographical notes of Gerald Patrick O'Hara in <https://web.archive.org/web/20101124220419/http://diosav.org/files/archives/S8924p05.pdf>.

⁴³ Congregation note, Savannah 1954. See also New York 1949, 3.

⁴⁴ On his life see MacGregor, *Steadfast in the Faith*, part. 166-97.

⁴⁵ Washington, D.C. 1954, 100. In answer no. 2 it is also specified that there were eight parishes composed of black people but they could choose to attend any church in the diocese: "et octo paroeciis pro Nigritis quia hae Ecclesiae sitae sunt in districtibus quos incolunt maxime Nigritae; integrum est autem Nigritis quamlibet Ecclesiam in Archidioecesi extantem frequentare".

⁴⁶ Washington, D.C. 1954, 100: "Cum nuper decretum fuerit a Summo Tribunali 'segregationem', quam vocant, puerorum in scholis publicis, ratione coloris, contra leges esse, plurimi nigritarum huc confluunt. E contra vero multi e genere Caucasio in Comitatus Marylandiae et Virginiae transmigrant ubi pauci hactenus inveniuntur nigritae. Inde ab anno 1948 Ordinarius quasi decretum Summi Tribunalis praevertens, decrevit nullum in posterum faciendum esse discrimen puerorum, ratione coloris, quoad scholares Archidioecesananas elementarias. [...] Universitas vero Catholica Americae inde ab anno

In this way the diocese of Washington, D.C. asserted its position in the vanguard of civil rights. It is interesting to note, however, that in Chicago, which was considered a kind of laboratory for civil rights, there was no mention of the racial issue in the *relationes ad limina* (except in terms of numbers, i.e., how many black people lived in the diocese),⁴⁷ whereas in the diocese of Savannah Bishop O'Hara paternalistically described a *de facto* segregated church.⁴⁸

4 Conclusions

In conclusion, in the case of the US, the *relatio ad limina* source for the most part helps to confirm developments in US Catholicism already partly outlined by historical studies, but in addition mirrors the pervasive tone of the reflections of the diocesan bishops. In the *relatio*, Rome forced the ordinaries to answer a long and detailed questionnaire, which sometimes did not fully probe the reality and issues they themselves were experiencing. The questionnaire reflects Roman priorities over the priorities of local churches, and not vice versa. This often makes the *relationes* sound somewhat pedestrian and lacking in creativity. Still, some US bishops took the task seriously. What emerges as the strongest concerns are: 1) opposition to secularism (more than to communism), and especially to the attack on the family and the biopolitical sphere; 2) the focus of attention on Catholic education as a means of evangelisation of American society, though still with a view of competing against Protestant denominations and more generally against indifferentism; 3) and, complementary to Catholics' numerical growth, the strategic and thoughtful use of modern media, such as radio and television, to establish a church presence in increasingly relevant public spaces.

1935 nigritas patet. Cum decretum Summi Tribunalis proclamatum fuit, mense Maio proxime praeterito, ephemerides saeculares omnes hoc Ecclesiae laudi verti voluerunt quod Ecclesia Catholica iam aliquot ante annos nigritas in scholas suas adimisset”.

⁴⁷ Answer no. 3 in both Chicago 1949 and 1954.

⁴⁸ Savannah 1954, 100: “In partibus meridionalibus Statuum Foederatorum Americae Septentrionalis, uti bene notum est, Nigri generatim ab “albis” despiciuntur et tamquam cives “secundae classis” tractantur. Dolendum est nonnullos catholicos, qui nati cum sint in regione meridionali, haereditasse ab avis suis hunc spiritum” (In the southern parts of the United States of America, as is well known, black people are generally looked down upon by the “whites” and they are treated as “second class” citizens. It is unfortunate that some Catholics who were born in the southern region, have inherited this spirit from their ancestors).

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Looking for Traces of the Ecumenical Question in the *relationes ad limina* of the German Bishops (1948-58)

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Abstract A historiographical hypothesis ascribed the Holy See's first post-war pronouncement on ecumenism (5 June 1948) to information gathered during *ad limina* visits of German bishops that year. This article aims to verify it. 'Case studies' have therefore been chosen from among the dioceses most involved in the 'Una-Sancta-Arbeit'. What emerges, in particular, is the urgency of the refugee problem and the practice of the *simultaneum*, i.e., the sharing of churches between denominations. This analysis will also help to verify whether and how the 'literary genre' of *relationes* can be used as a source in the field of the history of Catholic ecumenism.

Keywords Ecumenism. Holy Office. Una Sancta Arbeit. German refugees. Vertriebene. Simultaneum.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Roots of the 1948 Holy Office Monitum in the German Ecumenical Situation. – 3 Paderbornensis Ecclesia: Paradigmatic of Post-War Germany. – 4 The Interconfessional Consequences of the Refugee Emergency: Mixed Marriages and Shared Churches. – 5 Traces of Ecumenical Activities in the *relationes*. – 6 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

This contribution will study the *relationes ad limina* from the particular perspective of the history of Catholic ecumenism, trying to identify traces of ecumenical issues in the periodical reports sent to Rome by local bishops. The aim is to verify how this 'literary genre' can be used as a source for this historiographical field and therefore if and how the *relationes* constituted a channel of information for the Roman dicasteries on the ecumenical reality in the dioceses.

To this end, some 'case studies' have been chosen according to the criterion of their 'activity' in the ecumenical field. In this contribution, all the case studies were drawn from Germany, i.e., from the German dioceses most involved in the 'Una-Sancta-Arbeit'. A special focus will be given to the diocese of Paderborn, which constitutes a notable example and also a paradigmatic reality of the situation of ecumenical confrontation in Germany. A brief background premise is useful to explain the reasons for this choice.

2 The Roots of the 1948 Holy Office Monitum in the German Ecumenical Situation

On 5 June 1948, the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office issued a document, the "Monitum de motione oecumenica" entitled *Cum Compertum*, which constituted the first pronouncement of the Holy See, and indeed of the pontificate of Pius XII, on the ecumenical theme since Pius XI's encyclical *Mortalium animos* twenty years earlier.¹ The *monitum* preceded by three months the constitutive assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) that, held in Amsterdam in August 1948, would consecrate the official beginning of the international ecumenical movement, gathering delegates from more than a hundred Churches around the world.² The press at the time had no doubts in attributing the origins of the Holy Office's *monitum* to the Amsterdam convocation, especially when the Holy See made known its refusal to send Catholic delegates or observers to the as-

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¹ Studies based on the archival fonds of Pius XI (Barbolla, "La genesi della *Mortalium animos*") have shown the causal connection between the German ecumenical situation - in particular the activities of the *Hochkirchlich-Ökumenischer Bund* of Friedrich Heiler - and the encyclical, which for a long time was believed to have been caused by the experiment of Anglo-Catholic conversations in Malines sponsored by cardinal Désiré Mercier. See also Levant, "The Positioning of the Roman Catholic Church".

² Cf. Visser 't Hooft, "The Genesis of the World Council".

sembly. Indeed, the Geneva leaders of the WCC had long sought Roman Catholic representation, encouraging well-known Catholic ecumenists, such as Yves Congar, to obtain specific permission from the Holy See.³ In reality, *Cum Compertum* was nothing more than a sharp and brief warning, emphasising the prohibitions of interdenominational talks already present in Canon law, without expressing value judgements on the ecumenical instance. In particular, it recalled canon 1325, which forbade Catholics, both lay people and priests, from participating in and even more so from organising public disputes or interdenominational theological discussions without special authorisation from Rome, and canons 731 and 1278, which excluded participation in common liturgical celebrations or any form of *communicatio in sacris*.⁴ The *monitum* thus seemed to be conceived as a document not only intended for those who aspired to attend the Amsterdam meeting (to whom a written prohibition came anyway), but also aimed, as the preparatory drafts preserved in the archives of the Holy Office show, at curbing the local activities of Catholic ecumenism, which had flourished especially in the 1930s and 1940s and had experienced exponential growth after the war.

The historian Étienne Fouilloux, a pioneer of French ecumenical studies, launched a convincing hypothesis exactly forty years ago, assuming as the immediate cause of the Holy Office's *monitum* the *ad limina* visit made in April 1948 by eight German bishops to Rome.⁵ He hypothesised this also in the light of several interviews given by these prelates and a commentary aired by Radio Vaticana in the aftermath of the *monitum* that seemed to clearly link the Holy Office's measure to the ecumenical situation in Germany.⁶ Indeed, after 1945, the involvement of German Catholics in the cause of Christian unity had reached such a level of expansion and spread that it was unheard of in other national contexts. Thanks to a martyr of the Nazi regime, the Catholic priest Max Josef Metzger, a dense network of hundreds of local ecumenical circles scattered throughout Germany and gathering several thousand affiliates, both men and women, had consoli-

³ Congar, "La question des observateurs"; Congar, *Journal*, 143-53; Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité*, 781-98. See also WCC, *Memorandum on Memorandum concerning Roman Catholic observers and WCC, Report on the Roman Church*.

⁴ SO, "Cum Compertum", 5 June 1948.

⁵ Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité*, 906. Among these bishops were the five archbishops who led the former five German ecclesiastical provinces: Michael Faulhaber, archbishop of Munich; Josef Frings, archbishop of Cologne; Lorenz Jaeger, archbishop of Paderborn; Josef Otto Kolb, archbishop of Bamberg; Wendelin Rauch, archbishop of Freiburg im Breisgau. That visit was also attended by the bishop of Berlin, Cardinal Konrad von Preysing.

⁶ Commentary also published as Ambord, "Ein Kommentar".

dated under the name ‘Una Sancta Bewegung’.⁷ Many circles far exceeded one hundred participants.⁸ The vast proportions of the Una Sancta Movement had prompted the Fulda Bishops’ Conference in 1943, at the suggestion of the Archbishop of Paderborn Lorenz Jaeger, to set up a specific commission for its supervision and coordination.⁹ And Jaeger himself, who was entrusted with the chairmanship of this commission, in an interview with Radio Vaticana during his stay in Rome in April 1948, seemed to imply that one of the purposes of his *ad limina* visit was to inform Rome about the German ecumenical situation, stating that the Pope was “following the Una Sancta movement very closely”.¹⁰

The analysis of the Paderborn *relatio* of 1948, a report compiled in March of that year and which Jaeger probably delivered by hand, in this contribution is therefore the starting point for verifying Fouilloux’s thesis, although I will not refrain from referring to data from other dioceses for comparison where possible.¹¹

3 Paderbornensis Ecclesia: Paradigmatic of Post-War Germany

The archdiocese of Paderborn is a particular exemplification but also a paradigmatic reality of ecumenical challenges in Germany. Firstly, it constitutes a peculiar case because of its archbishop, who was not only the chairman and even the inspirer of the Commission in charge of ecumenism within the Fulda Conference but a true pioneer of ecumenical dialogue in Germany.¹² In 1946, in fact, with the coop-

⁷ On Metzger see Rendle, *Max Josef Metzger*, and Ernesti, *Ökumene im Dritten Reich*, 182-208, which uses and publishes several unseen documents from the Metzger archive in Meitingen and the archives of the secret police.

⁸ Here some of the most numerous circles: Nordhausen, Bielefeld, Mainz, Frankfurt, Hannover, Hamm, Leipzig, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Jena, Krefeld, Naumburg, Erfurt, Bornstedt, Sangershausen, Eisleben, Passau, Bamberg, Düsseldorf, Niederaltaich, Metten, Beuron, and Weingarten. Cf. Heiler, “Utopie oder Wirklichkeit”, 10. See also Swidler, *The Ecumenical Vanguard*, 137-8.

⁹ Volk, *Akten deutscher Bischöfe*, 133-46, here 144 (minutes of the plenary meeting of 17-19 August 1943). See also Klein, “Es begann mit der Una-Sancta”.

¹⁰ An account of the interview was given in French by *Vers l’unité chrétienne*, circulaire no. 3, May 1948, 6 (a copy is kept in WCC Archives, 4201.1.1.1, ff. 162-167).

¹¹ Together with the *relatio*, the archive (Paderborn 1948) contains the parchments attesting to Jaeger’s fulfilment of the visit to the apostolic basilicas of St Paul and St Peter, which was obligatory in the program of an *ad limina* visit. These visits to the basilicas took place, one on 12 and the other on 13 April 1948, while the same archival folder shows the date of Jaeger’s audience in person at the Consistorial Congregation on 15 April.

¹² Cf. Priesching, Otto, *Lorenz Jaeger als Ökumeniker*.

eration of his Protestant counterpart in the diocese, the Oldenburg *Landesbischof* Wilhelm Stählin, he inaugurated a circle for theological dialogue between specialists drawn from both confessions. The so-called Jaeger-Stählin Kreis, which would meet regularly at least twice a year from then on until today, due to such an institutionalised form under interdenominational episcopal patronage, was thus a unicum in Europe.¹³ This was followed in 1956 by the establishment of the Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut für Ökumenik, which is also still active today.¹⁴ However, of all these activities, which formed the core of Jaeger's pastoral commitment, there is hardly a trace in his diocesan *relationes*. The impression, for this diocese as for the others examined, is that, framed in the constraining grid of 100 questions of the 1918 questionnaire, the peculiar reality of each diocese, beyond the different statistics on the number of priests, parishes and population ratios according to the *Land* they belonged to, was flattened on a canvas that exalted homogeneities rather than differences. The question, then, is to determine whether this choice of homogeneity was due to the 'literary genre' upstream or rather downstream to a precise will of 'concealment' on the part of the compiler.

Certainly, the diocese of Paderborn, due to the peculiarities of its territory, was hardly comparable to any other, wounded in its borders by fractures that well represented on a diocesan scale the whole drama of the German situation in the aftermath of the conflict. That's the reason why it was such a paradigmatic diocese. In fact, in 1948 its territory was divided into five administrative districts, falling in different occupation zones: one, Waldeck, in the American zone, two, Arnsberg and Minden-Detmold, in the British zone and two others, the districts of Magdeburg and Merseburg, in the Russian zone.¹⁵ Whereas this was the situation attested by Jaeger's 1948 report, five years later, after the establishment of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) and the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD), the diocese presented a different picture. With a territory definitively fractured into two sections respectively east and west of the Iron Curtain, even communication within the diocese was difficult in this new situation. For instance, since seminarians could no longer travel freely to the west,¹⁶ it was necessary to establish, as reported by

¹³ Schwahn, *Der Ökumenische Arbeitskreis*; Burkard, "Chefsache Ökumene".

¹⁴ Hardt, "Die Anfänge der Ökumene"; Thönissen, "Von der Konfessionskunde".

¹⁵ Paderborn 1948, 1-2. Cf. Gruß, *Erzbischof Lorenz Jaeger*, 259-77.

¹⁶ Even if travel for his clergy was not so easy, Jaeger was always authorised to enter and leave the eastern territory, e.g., to administer confirmations: "Jurisdictio et dignitas episcopalis servari poterat illaesa et honorata. [...] Semper usque adhuc in partem orientalem intrare potui ibique muneribus episcopalibus fungi. Perdifficile saepius episcopo mec auxiliari Magdeburgi residenti munus evadit ecclesiae jura defendendi et magna ibi adhibenda est animi fortitudo et prudentia" (Paderborn 1953, 19).

Jaeger in his 1953 *relatio*, three special seminaries for the eastern part: one minor, one major and one for those who were not admitted to public schools by the communist government because of their vocation to the priesthood.¹⁷

Moreover, Paderborn was a diocese where the Catholic confession was in a strong minority, with less than 2,500,000 believers out of a total population of almost ten million, and where only the small city of Paderborn (about 40,000 inhabitants) held the record for being the majority Catholic city (about 85%) and was thus the seat of the episcopal chair. On this very particular reality, as on all other German dioceses, the phenomenon of the influx of 12,000,000 displaced Germans from Eastern Europe fell with overwhelming force at the end of the Second World War. In 1953, Jaeger's diocese counted 810,000 immigrants from the Eastern territories, of which about 110,000 were Catholics.¹⁸ According to statistics compiled by the Fulda Bishops' Conference in July/August 1948, Paderborn was the second-largest diocese in Germany in terms of the number of refugees, preceded by Osnabrück with approximately 100,000 more displaced persons.¹⁹ As a term of comparison, in the small and not very distant diocese of Mainz (thirteenth in that ranking), approximately 160,000 refugees had flowed in out of a pre-war population of around 1,900,000: even though the population increase was only 8.5 %, this abrupt shift had greater proportions as far as the Catholic component was concerned, since about 145,000 of those refugees were Catholics, increasing the number of the Catholic Church's faithful in the diocese from 460,000 before the war to 605,000 in 1948. Albert Stohr, the bishop of Mainz, in his 1948 report offered an eloquent example: before 1947 there were 9,000 Catholics living in the Gießen deanery, the following year there were 74,000.²⁰ This situation, coupled with the human losses of the war conflict, also caused a shortage of priests, although along with the refugees, many Ori-

¹⁷ "*Seminarium Norbertinum Magdeburgi erectum omnes illos alumnus colligit, qui a gubernio communistarum zonae orientalis ad studia humaniora in publicis scholis non sunt admissi attamen clericali vocatione ad sacerdotium tendunt. Hi post peractas scholas inferiores in hoc Collegio humanioribus instruuntur usque ad maturitatis examen. [...] Huius seminarii cursus difficillimis conditionibus propter huius zonae orientalis circumstantias perducitur*" (Paderborn 1953, 22-3).

¹⁸ Paderborn 1953, 2.

¹⁹ Mertens, *Akten deutscher Bischöfe*, 237-8.

²⁰ Another example he cited: in the parish of Nidda before the war there were only 408 believers out of 32,200 inhabitants. After 1947 there were 9,700 Catholics out of 46,250 inhabitants (cf. Mainz 1948, 1-2). Thanks to the economic recovery, the population continued to grow in the following years, reaching 1,880,000 in 1953 (of which 647,000 were Catholics) and 2,000,000 in 1958 (of which 704,000 were Catholics) (cf. Mainz 1958, 1).

ental Presbyters also arrived.²¹ But along with the Catholic priests, Protestant pastors had also emigrated, often accompanied by their communities, creating potentially explosive problems of inter-confessional coexistence, especially in the *Länder* where the subversion of the situation inherited from the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* was most evident. Obviously, not all dioceses were equally affected by these demographic upheavals, nonetheless, on the impact of such a situation, the 1948 *relationes* of almost all German bishops agree, particularly in the context of their answers to questions numbers 84 to 99, i.e., the section on the status and morality of the *populo fideli*.

4 **The Interconfessional Consequences of the Refugee Emergency: Mixed Marriages and Shared Churches**

In fact, in Paderborn as elsewhere, accommodating refugees entailed heavy consequences, exacerbating the shortage of houses (already in short supply following the bombing) and consequently the material but also moral misery, given the amplified opportunities for promiscuity:

With many homes already destroyed during the war, the immigration of expellees now completely overtakes all residence facilities, so that very often couples with five or six children have to live in one room day and night at the same time. As a result, the integrity of life is endangered and the abuse of marriage and the collapse of family life are caused. This shows a certain intimate connection between the evils by which Christian life is endangered and the political, economic and social calamities that are completely beyond our capacity.²²

21 In Paderborn in 1953, for example, they were 250 out of a total of 1,778 secular priests in the diocese (Paderborn 1953, 3).

22 “Multis habitaculis bello iam destructis nunc immigration expulsoꝝ omnia habitationis loca omnino excedit, ita ut persaepe coniugibus cum quinque vel sex liberis in una camera die noctuque insimul versandum sit. Quo fit, ut honestas vitae periclitetur et inducatur matrimonii abusus et vitae familiaris ruina. Quo patet quidam intimus nexus inter mala, quibus vita christiana periclitatur, et calamitates politicas, oeconomicas et sociales, quae nostrum facultatem omnino excedunt” (Paderborn 1948, 39). Just before, in the same question no. 100 he wrote: “Undecim vel duodecim milliones hominum Germanicae linguae ex Provinciis orientalibus Germaniae, ex Bohemia Sudetorum, ex Hungaria et Jugoslavia sunt expulsi, e domibus et praediis suis eiecti, bonis suis privatis omnibus spoliati, iuribus naturalibus destituti, ex patria sua eradicati. Qui homines egentes ac omni spe frustrate ex desperation a seductoribus radicalibus vel nihilistis alliciuntur, praesertim si – ut multi expulsi ex Bohemia Sudetorum – ignorantia fidei catholicae laborant nec ad sacramentorum frequentiam sunt assuefacti” (Paderborn 1948, 38-9). Cf. Hirschfeld, “Ihr habt ein Recht”.

Population composition upheaval was also driving the exponential growth in the number of mixed marriages. In the Russian-occupied Magdeburg area, for instance, Jaeger reported that the rate of mixed marriages out of the total was about 70-80%,²³ although he justified this statistic with a certain compassion: “Catholic girls have lost hope of marrying a Catholic”, he wrote in 1953:

However, due to the raging war, Catholics mixed with non-Catholics: many Protestants were expelled from Silesia or Bohemia in Catholic regions and, conversely, many Catholics were expelled from Silesia or Bohemia in Protestant regions. As a result, so many men were killed in the war that Catholic girls gave up hope of marrying a Catholic. For all these reasons, mixed denominational marriages prevailed not only in the so-called ‘diaspora’, but also in the formerly completely Catholic countries.²⁴

Nevertheless, for other bishops, such a state of affairs was simply intolerable, especially in the *Länder* with a Catholic majority. Konrad Landersdorfer, the bishop of Passau in Bavaria, complained about the increase in the proportion of Protestants in his diocese from 1% pre-war to 10% post-war and how mixed marriages had quintupled from 91 registered in 1940 to 456 in 1946.²⁵ Even though ten years later this situation had become less serious, thanks to the decrease in both figures, the bishop nonetheless lamented that this had happened “not because of a greater loyalty of Catholics, but because of the emigration of many Protestants”, i.e., the relocation of many refugees to other German *Länder*.²⁶ The Ordinary at the head of the same ecclesiastical province, Michael von Faulhaber, archbishop of Munich, also deplored this phenomenon, which in 1948 he did not hesitate to describe as a “maxima crux”:

23 Paderborn 1948, 34; Paderborn 1953, 35. The Vatican archives do not keep a copy of the 1958 *relatio*.

24 “Attamen bello saeviente catholicis cum acatholicis permixtis multisque protestantibus in regiones catholicas expulsis et e converso multis catholicis ex Silesia vel Bohemia in regiones protestantium expulsis, deinde tam multis viris bello interfectis, puellis catholicis spe derelicta nubendi catholico: ex his omnibus causis matrimonia mixtae confessionis invaluerunt non solum in sic-dicta ‘Diaspora’, sed etiam in regionibus antea omnino catholicis” (Paderborn 1953, 18).

25 Passau 1953, 1, 8.

26 “Ceterum numerus ultimis annis aliquantulum diminutus est, non tam propter maiorem fidelitatem catholicorum quam propter emigrationem multorum protestantium, qui olim fugitivi vel expulsi in dioecesim venerant” (Passau 1958, 4). In fact, in 1948 the diocese of Passau numbered 550,000 residents of which 482,300 were Catholics (Passau 1948, 1). Whereas this composition remained almost unchanged in the 1953 census, in 1958 the number of residents fell slightly (515,000): the number of Catholics remained unchanged, but the Protestant percentage decreased to 7%.

Mixed marriages are today the greatest cross for pastors of souls. The events of the war and the turbulent times that followed raised the risk of marriage, especially for poor girls. Since the bride is generally Catholic, a dispensation must be granted so that the Catholic education of the children can at least be saved.²⁷

Bishop Joseph Freundorfer of Augsburg, in his first report in 1953, testified that he did everything in his power to frequently admonish his faithful “to abstain from such marriages”, in order to curb a scourge that his predecessor, Joseph Kumpfmüller, five years earlier (“I am sure that in this matter my priests do what they can”)²⁸ seemed to show more tolerance or resignation in the face of:

Marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics are a great evil, which increased dramatically in the post-war years due to cohabitation, when, in regions hitherto inhabited only by Catholics, many fugitives arrived from Protestant countries. I know that everything is being done by me and my priests, acting both with sermons and catechesis as well as private conversations and the distribution of books and pamphlets on this imminent danger to the true faith, so that people – parents and adolescents – learn to judge clearly and distinctly on this subject and to act in a truly Catholic manner. Every year in special provisions, which are added to the pastoral letters and then affixed throughout the year to the church gates, I urge everyone to abstain from such marriages.²⁹

27 “Matrimonia mixta pro animarum pastoribus hodie maxima crux. Eventibus belli et turbulentis temporibus subsequentibus maius periculum matrimoniorum excitatum est, praepremis pro puellis pauperibus. Sponsa cum generatim catholica sit, praestat dispensationem concedere, ut saltem educationem catholicam liberorum salvemus” (Munich 1948, 7).

28 With these very concise words, Kumpfmüller answered the question no. 32 in 1948: “Pro certo habeo hac in re sacerdotes meos concionibus, catechesis privatoque colloquio facere id quod possunt, sed saepe sine fructu. Matrimonia mixta imprimis per bellum et post bellum creverunt etiam cum fugitive acatholici in medio catholicae regionis vivant. Exinde etiam multiplicantur divortia matrimoniorum, sicut queritur tribunal pro matrimoniis” (Augsburg 1948, 5).

29 “Nuptiae inter catholicos et acatholicos magnum malum sunt, quod in annis post bellum elapsis valde crevit propter cohabitationem, cum in regions adhuc a catholicis solis habitatas multi fugitive ex regionibus protestanticis venissent. A me et a sacerdotibus meis omnia fieri scio, et concione et catechesis et colloquio private et distributione librorum et libellorum de hoc fidei verae imminenti periculo agentium, ut homines – et parentes et adolescentes – clare et distincte de hac re iudicare et vere catholice agere discant. Omni anno in specialibus praescriptis, quae litteris pastoralibus adduntur et postea in ecclesiae portis per totum annum affiguntur, omnes moneo, ut se a talibus nuptiis abstineant” (Augsburg 1953, 16).

The examples of Augsburg, Passau and Munich are not given by chance. Although Bavarian and therefore predominantly Catholic dioceses, the presence of the Una Sancta Movement was stronger in these territories than elsewhere. In Augsburg, for example, in the small town of Meitingen, the congregation of Christ the King (Christus-König-Gesellschaft), founded by Metzger and consecrated to Christian unity, had its headquarters since 1928, as did the publishing house Kyrios Verlag linked to the congregation. The journal *Una Sancta Zeitschrift* was also printed there, which reached all German cities in tens of thousands of copies and was subject to the direct *imprimatur* of the local bishop. Just after arriving at the Augsburg see in February 1949, Freundorfer, among other things, had to intervene to remove its editor, Matthias Laros, at the direct request of the Roman Holy Office.³⁰ Yet, of all this activity and the existence of Metzger's congregation in the diocese, still active there to this day, there is no mention at all in the *relationes* of 1948, 1953 and 1958, with the exception of the purely statistical list in response to question no. 80.³¹ However, the answers to question no. 32 about mixed marriages would seem to reveal a subtle discrepancy between the two Augsburg bishops Kumpfmüller and Freundorfer concerning the presence of Protestants in their diocese, which could explain why the Una Sancta Movement was able to establish its foundations in Meitingen and work there undisturbed until 1949. It is certainly a hypothesis that should be investigated further, beyond the mere data that emerges from the comparison of the *relationes*.

In the same *Land*, Passau was home to the Benedictine abbey of Niederaltaich, which, modelled on the 'union monastery' in Chevetogne, Belgium, had since 1934, under the leadership of Abbot Emmanuel Heufelder, devoted itself to the cause of unity, hosting monks of both Latin and Byzantine rites and celebrating 'union days' that were renowned throughout the Country and that periodically hosted hundreds of participants, including non-Catholics. From 1953, it also became the nerve centre of the Una Sancta Movement, since, after Laros' removal, the leadership of the movement, as well as the direction of the journal, passed to the monk Thomas Sartory.³² Even this important presence, located only a few kilometres from the Czechoslovak border and for this reason not infrequently a refuge for priests and monks who fled from the east, is never mentioned in

30 Marotta, *Gli anni della pazienza*, 167-70. The request for removal came from the Holy Office to the German Bishops' Conference in February 1949. Cf. Minutes of Feria II, 10 January 1949.

31 "Sorores Christi Regis in Meitingen, quae caritati, imprimis operibus spiritualis misericordiae necnon literaturae religiosae catholicae, etiam inter eos, qui a vera Ecclesia catholica separati sunt, propagandae se dedunt. Numerus sodalium: 91" (Augsburg 1953, 36). The same in Augsburg 1958, 24.

32 Marotta, "Ökumene von Unten", 558-62.

Landersdorfer's *relationes*, except for the canonical question no. 3, as mere statistics.

Finally, Munich hosted one of the largest circles of the German *Una Sancta* Movement, founded between 1935 and 1936 by the Lutheran Friedrich Heiler and the Jesuit Max Pribilla,³³ and which had reached a membership of 500 Catholics and Protestants already in its early years.³⁴ Once again, nothing emerges about the activities of this circle in the *relationes* of the Munich diocese preserved in the Vatican. Nothing surfaces even in Faulhaber's 1948 *relatio*, who nevertheless had an intense correspondence with the leader of the circle on the evangelical side, Wilhelm Freiherr von Pechmann, to whom in April 1940 he had written, recognising him as "a herald and foreman of the *Una Sancta*" (*ein Herold und ein Vorarbeiter der Una Sancta*):

I cannot but agree one more time with your principles: in hope and love we must now put aside what separates us and not forget that the world situation is no longer the same as it was in the 16th century and that even mistakes made by one side or the other do not invalidate the commandment of the Lord in John 17 [*ut unum sint*].³⁵

This was not an isolated occurrence. The same year, just a month earlier, in his Palm Sunday homily, the cardinal had publicly praised the *Una Sancta* circle, to which he had given official approval:

These men know the historical facts and respect the beliefs of their brothers and sisters. They do not want to create proselytes – in the negative sense of the word – and therefore do not do so, because in their debates there are no teachers and pupils facing each other, rather both confess themselves as pupils of the One who is called teacher in the Gospel (Mt. 23:10).³⁶

33 Heiler, the leader of the Hochkirchlich-Ökumenischer Bund, had written to Provost Paul Simon of Paderborn on 4 July 1935 explaining that he wanted "to travel to Munich and then attempt to initiate similar circles for dogmatic discussions between Catholic and Protestant theologians" (Ernesti, *Ökumene im Dritten Reich*, 71). Heiler and Simon in April 1934 had been the chairmen of the conference in Hermsdorf, near Berlin, which Max Pribilla had also attended and which constituted the first ecumenical conference on German soil in the twentieth century.

34 Cf. Metzlaff, "Der Una-Sancta-Kreis München"; Stahl, *Eins in Ihm*; Linhart, "Der Una-Sancta-Kreis München".

35 Sommer, *Wilhelm Freiherr von Pechmann*, 227, who published a letter from Faulhaber to Pechmann dated 6 April 1940 that was extraordinarily laudatory, even though it referred specifically to his fight against National Socialism. The correspondence between Faulhaber and Pechmann is kept in the diocesan archives in Munich.

36 Homily of 3 March 1940, in Ernesti, *Ökumene im Dritten Reich*, 218.

In the 1920s Faulhaber had intervened several times with the church authorities to prevent *Una Sancta Zeitschrift* from being placed on the Index, and in 1941 he had courageously defended the circle also to Nuncio Cesare Orsenigo: "I respectfully ask you not to prohibit these discussions".³⁷ Furthermore, for the study meetings and common prayers of the circle, which considered itself above all a prayer community, meeting in private homes and parish halls,³⁸ Faulhaber often makes the sacristy of his cathedral available.³⁹ This too is obviously not mentioned in his *relatio*, although in response to question no. 19 on liturgical uses, the archbishop admitted in passing that he had opened up the possibility of *simultaneum*, i.e., the use of the same place of worship by Catholics and another denomination.⁴⁰ The diocese of Munich, like all Bavarian dioceses, was in fact experiencing the reverse of the problem that plagued the rest of Germany, namely the serious spiritual emergency generated by the problem of displaced persons:

Immigration from the East has brought Catholics to villages where there are neither churches nor chapels; and therefore divine worship must be celebrated in private homes or Protestant churches.⁴¹

This is how, in his 1948 *relatio*, briefly justified himself Bishop Albert Stohr of Mainz, who in the following years would also have to face the problem of the continuous influx of immigrants due to the growth of industrialisation in his area.⁴² The bishop of Limburg, Ferdinand Dirichs, echoed Stohr with much more explanation:

The greatest shortage of churches has arisen in those regions of the diocese, which are commonly known as the 'Diaspora'. In fact, in these regions, where only a very few Catholics had previously

³⁷ Faulhaber, Letter to Orsenigo, 05-08-1941, in Volk, *Akten Kardinal Michael von Faulhabers*, 775-80 (Doc. No. 822)

³⁸ Especially in the 1940s, in order to escape the control of the gestapo, which arrested several members, meetings were held secretly in the apartments of Paula Linhart and Emmy von Miller. Cf. Linhart, "Der Una-Sancta-Kreis München".

³⁹ Stahl, *Eins in Ihm*, 9.

⁴⁰ "Quoad sanctitatem loci leges liturgicae omnino observantur. Attamen timendum est, ne sectis acatholicis russicis abusus irrepant. Episcopi Bavariae novas cautelas statuerunt de simultaneo usu ecclesiarum nostrarum cum lutheranis fugitivis" (Munich 1948, 5).

⁴¹ "Immigratio ex oriente catholicos in vicos perduxit, ubi neque ecclesiae neque sacella habentur et ideo cultus divinus in domibus privatis vel Ecclesiis protestantibus celebrari debet" (Mainz 1948, 7).

⁴² "Numerus ecclesiarum in singulis oppidis plerumque sufficit necessitati fidelium, etsi augmentum catholicorum praecipue in regionibus industrialibus semper novas aedes construere cogit" (Mainz 1953, 3). The 1958 census recorded 130,000 more workers than in 1953, out of a population that had risen from 1,750,000 in 1946 to 2,070,000 (cf. Mainz 1958, 1; Mainz 1953, 1; Mainz 1948, 1).

been dispersed, new homes were assigned to many tens of thousands of exiled Catholics, so that in all the villages and towns that had previously been purely Protestant, quite large Catholic communities often sprang up. In all these districts, the sacrifice of the Holy Mass had to be celebrated in Protestant churches almost everywhere and here and there, but rarely, also in secular places. Meanwhile, there is no possibility to effectively remedy this catastrophic calamity.⁴³

In fact, whereas in Bavaria it was the Catholics who had to come to the aid of other Christians by providing them with places of worship for their Protestant religious services in an area that did not provide any as it was overwhelmingly Catholic, elsewhere the bombings and the influx of immigration had led to a shortage of Catholic temples, a shortage that even the generous and enormous efforts at rapid reconstruction could not compensate for in the short term. Furthermore, at the end of the 1950s, the economic recovery added to the spiritual needs of the refugees also those of the workers in the expanding industrial areas, such as in the Saar, as well as those of a different type of refugees, namely those who escaped from the Soviet control zone.

This situation, which recurred with the same script in all the German dioceses, only a few bishops tried to remedy (or only a few in the *relationes* confessed to doing so) by adopting creative solutions, including sharing churches with the German Evangelical Church or borrowing them from it, a solution that entailed inevitable interdenominational and liturgical risks. The bishop of Berlin, Cardinal Konrad von Preysing, had initially attempted to overcome this emergency by multiplying the Masses, and thus giving priests permission to 'binare' or even 'trinare', i.e., to celebrate even two or three times on the same day to meet the spiritual needs of the faithful.⁴⁴ However, even in this diocese, the devastation inherited from the massive war bombing had made the use of evangelical places of worship inevitable, a use that von Preysing sought unsuccessfully to play down by emphasizing that these were already Catholic churches in ancient times:

43 "Maxima ecclesiarum penuria in iis diocesis regionibus orta est, quae 'Diaspora' vulgo audiunt. In his enim regionibus, ubi antea paucissimi tantum catholici dispersi inveniebantur, multis decemmillibus catholicorum exsulum nova domicilia assignata sunt, ita ut in omnibus vicis et oppidis antea mere protestanticis communitates catholicae saepe sat magnae ortae sint. In omnibus istis districtibus S. Missae sacrificium fere ubique in ecclesiis protestanticis celebrari debet, hinc inde, attamen raro, etiam in locis profanis. Nulla interim conspicitur possibilitates huic calamitati catastrophali efficaciter medendi" (Limburg 1948, 10).

44 The Vespers Mass, intended especially for workers, would not be conceded by Pius XII until 6 January 1953 with the apostolic constitution *Christus Dominus* which also softened the rules on Eucharistic fasting.

In the smaller villages of the Berlin diocese, outside the city, in several places the parish church buildings have been destroyed, so that other decent, worthy and suitable places to worship are used, with the Ordinary's permission and with the additional license for priests to trine, according to the Indult granted to the Ordinary by the Apostolic See. In rural regions, for the faithful who have fled from the eastern provinces (Silesia, Pomerania, Prussia), the sacraments are celebrated in private houses, whose places are devoutly decorated by the faithful. In some cases, Mass is celebrated in the churches of the Protestant sect, which are willingly offered for this purpose by its ministers; some of these churches are old Catholic churches (dating back to the Reformation period). All liturgical and canonical precepts are strictly observed.⁴⁵

Multiplying masses in the same building was a solution that had the disadvantage of not remedying the sometimes enormous distances that separated the faithful from places of worship and often discouraged them from observing the Sunday precept. For this reason, in many dioceses, where the largest number of evacuees had taken refuge, the use of "Protestant temples" was unavoidable, such as in Osnabrück,⁴⁶ Hildesheim⁴⁷ or in Paderborn, where even in 1953 more than 700 places of worship were still missing, as denounced by Jaeger.⁴⁸

45 "In minoribus oppidis dioecesis Berolinensis extra urbem diversis in locis aedificia ecclesiarum parochialium deleta sunt, pro quibus alia loca decentia, digna et apta ad cultum exercendum cum licentia Ordinarii adhibentur et addita licentia trinandi pro sacerdotibus ex Indulto quod Sedes Apostolica Ordinarii concessit. Regionibus ruralibus pro fidelibus fugitivis ex provinciis orientalibus (Silesiam, Pomeranae, Borussiae) sacra celebrantur in domibus privatis, quorum loca a fidelibus pie ornantur. Quibusdam casibus missa celebratur in ecclesiis sectae protestantica, quae a eius ministris ad hoc libenter offeruntur; quaedam ex istis ecclesiis sunt antiquae catholicae ecclesiae (ex tempore reformationis). Omnia praecepta liturgica et canonistica strictissime observantur" (Berlin 1948, 17-18).

46 "Numerus ecclesiarum minime sufficit in regione diasporae, ubi multis locis ecclesiae vel oratoria desiderantur, quippe cum orthodoxae fidei cultores usque ad bellum finitum et immigrationem profugorum illic non habitaverint. Missa celebrari debet his locis in domibus privatis vel etiam in templis lutheranis, si fideles in alium locum convocari nequeunt, ut legi de audiendo Sacro satisfaciant" (Osnabrück 1948, no. 20).

47 "Numerus ecclesiarum generatim sufficit in regionibus catholicis, minime vero in iis vastis regionibus, in quibus catholici inter heterodoxos dispersi habitant et, sicut supra dictum est, ultimis annis [myriades] ex Germania orientali expulsores nunc sedem collocaverunt. Necessitatibus exinde provenientibus ex minima tantum parte satisfieri potuit, quia opes et materialia non sufficiunt. Nihilominus in isto quinquennio decem ecclesiae vel oratoria publica sunt instituta. In multis locis autem ita salutis animarum providetur, ut sacerdos diebus dominicis et festivis in domo private aut in ecclesia acatholica missam celebret, sacramenta administret, verbum Dei praedicet" (Hildesheim 1948, 12).

48 "Deficientibus ecclesiis catholicis, omnibus aliis domibus hominibus repletis in circa 700 locis missae in templis protestantium errant celebrandae, ut catholici tali saltem modo missae possint adstare" (Paderborn 1953, 13).

However, apart from these bishops, all the others in their *relationes* made it clear that they did not want to remedy the shortage of churches in any other way than by rebuilding or renovating damaged ones. These may have been their real intentions, but it could also be that they rightly feared that the reference in the *relationes* to the practice of *simultaneum* and the indiscriminate use of churches of other denominations would only alarm rather than comfort the Roman authorities.⁴⁹ These in fact could well perceive what the bishops omitted to make explicit, that is, how frequent was the risk that many Catholics, who found themselves in cities often lacking churches or priests of their own confession, would often attend religious services of rival confessions. It is therefore not surprising that on the very evening that the *monitum Cum Compertum* appeared, the Holy Office's assessor, Alfredo Ottaviani, told some journalists that the warning was addressed to the condemnation of joint worship services between Catholics and non-Catholics, which the Congregation had recently become aware of.⁵⁰ However, it was above all the comment provided the next day by a German speaker of Vatican Radio, Father Beato Ambord, that related the *monitum* to the German ecumenical reality, to which he stated without hesitation that the measure was directed:

As to the reasons for the promulgation of this admonition at the present time, we would like to point to the wild growth [*Wildwuchs*] which has made its appearance on the fringes of the *Una Sancta* movement, and which by now has penetrated deep into its centre [...] Joint services or joint prayers were by no means unusual.⁵¹

This statement by Ambord, especially since it limited the prohibitions of the *monitum* only to ecumenical meetings without prior episcopal approval, most likely intending to safeguard activities such as those

⁴⁹ It is no coincidence that still in 1953, the Holy Office instructed the Apostolic Nuncio Aloysius Joseph Muench to interrogate all German bishops in order to obtain precise statistics on the permanence of the *Simultankirchen*. The resulting report testified that 1,000 Catholic churches were still given to Protestants and no less than 6,500 Evangelical places of worship were used by Catholics for the celebration of mass. Cf. Enquiry *Simultankirchen* 1954.

⁵⁰ "Monsignor Alfredo Ottaviani, one of the three main directors of the Holy Office, told newspaper men tonight that the Vatican has learned that in the United States, Germany and Switzerland Catholics have joined non-Catholics in common worship services. He said that in some cases Protestants have been given Holy Communion in Catholic churches and that in other cases Catholics have taken part in services in Protestant worship places commemorating Christ's Last Supper. Monsignor Ottaviani said that the Holy Office warning is aimed in particularly strong terms at the condemnation of these joint services" (McGurn, "Vatican Warns").

⁵¹ An English translation was provided by *The Tablet*, 12 June 1948.

of the Jaeger-Stählin Kreis,⁵² had such an international echo that the Jesuit Franz Hürth, consultant at the Holy Office, requested a rectification.⁵³ From all this, it does not seem unfounded to hypothesise, as Fouilloux did, that the *ad limina* visit of Jaeger and the other German prelates in April 1948 may have been the occasion on which the Holy See gathered information on the interdenominational situation in the German dioceses.

5 Traces of Ecumenical Activities in the *relationes*

The *relationes*, even those of the dioceses most active in that field, let the ecumenical problem emerge as a watermark, coming into play only indirectly, that is, by answering the explicit question on mixed marriages, expressly provided for in question no. 32, or that of question no. 20 on the adequacy of the number of buildings for worship in relation to the needs of the faithful. On the other hand, it is also true that the questionnaire the bishops answered, which was the one published by the consistory congregation in 1918, did not include a specific question on ecumenism. Several elements suggest that this reticence, especially from the bishops of the so-called 'ecumenical' dioceses, was not only due to the limitations of the scheme devised thirty years earlier. A starting point may be the analysis of open question no. 100, where the bishops finally had the opportunity to address what they held most dear, although many dismissed it in a few lines instead. We have only two cases where something of the ecumenical activities of these dioceses shines through in the answers to this question: Paderborn and Mainz.

52 "Nicht berührt sind durch das Dekret, – so erklärte man abschließend – ernste, religiöse Auseinandersetzungen im engsten oder engeren Kreis, wobei z.B. die Abweichungen in den verschiedenen Bekenntnissen klar herausgearbeitet werden und der katholische Standpunkt in seinen Verhältnis zu den übrigen Bekenntnissen dargelegt wird. Das geschieht ja auch im Konvertitennunterricht" (Ambord, "Ein Kommentar"). It is no coincidence that another consultant of the Holy Office, the Paderbornian Josef Grendel, had proposed sending this article by Ambord to various bishops, including Jaeger, as an authentic interpretation of the *monitum*: "Il Rev.mo P. Grendel, in una lettera a S.E. Mons. Assessore in data 16 giugno 1948, scriveva a questo proposito: Se mi è permesso aggiungere subito il mio umile parere, osservo che a riguardo dei chiarimenti in merito al 'monito' del 5 giugno, si potrebbe forse in via privata rimandare S.E. l'Arcivescovo ad un articolo che sta nel Supplemento 'Christliche Kultur' delle 'Neue Züricher Nachrichten' dell'11 giugno che contiene una buona spiegazione del Monito del 5 giugno in merito alla sua occasione, al suo scopo e *al suo senso*. L'autore secondo le iniziali apposte è evidentemente il P. Beato Ambord, S.I., il locutore tedesco alla Radio Vaticana. (Il S.O. però non diede alcun suggerimento di questo genere all'Arcivescovo di Paderborn)" (SO, Report October 1948, 2-3).

53 "Il Rev.mo P. Hürth ha inviato al S.O. un importante Pro-memoria, in cui criticava la suddetta interpretazione; e il Santo Padre, nell'Udienza accordata a Mons. Assessore, nella FERIA V, 21 ottobre 1948, ha stabilito: 'Reassumptis praecedentibus, fiat relatio et proponatur prout de more'" (SO Report October 1948, 3).

Lorenz Jaeger from Paderborn mainly used answer no. 100 to emphasise once again the moral decay of the German population, mainly due to indigence and materialistic society.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, he also used this response to finally hint at his efforts at dialogue with non-Catholics, although in the 1948 *relatio* this mention is only *en passant*:

Even non-Catholics nourish reverence towards the Holy See; and here, perhaps, is born the best fruit of the present distress. Today almost everyone turns the eyes of their mind to the Church, which, as the pillar of faith and as the rock of hope and as the burning fire of charity in the storms and tempests of today, is precisely that heavenly city built eternally on the mountains, which cannot remain hidden from the eyes of those who seek it. As a result, many non-Catholics have gradually drawn closer to the Catholic Church, and in the religious discussions of learned men of both confessions, not disregarding canon 1325 §3,⁵⁵ not a few Protestants who excelled in science and humanity have been reconciled with Holy Mother Church. May the Holy Spirit increase their number, which is already growing day by day, and lead many back to the unity that is founded on the rock of blessed Peter.⁵⁶

Jaeger in fact cited these dialogues in the context of the undisputed esteem earned by the Catholic Church in the reconstruction of Germany, in which it had fully succeeded in presenting itself, and to a greater extent than the Evangelical Churches, as a point of reference and authoritative mediator between the population and the occupying forces that had won the war. This esteem, together with Jaeger's efforts for theological dialogues between specialists of both confessions, had brought about some conversions to the Roman Catholic

54 The archives of the Consistorial Congregation unfortunately do not contain the text of the 1958 *relatio*, which would perhaps have confirmed the trend highlighted by Francesco Tacchi of a progressive shift in the attribution of the reasons for moral decay from the material misery inherited from the war to the rampant materialism of consumer society ten years later (cf. Tacchi in this issue).

55 "Let Catholics beware lest they have debates or conferences, especially public ones, with non-Catholics without having come to the Holy See or, if the case is urgent, to the local Ordinary" (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 1917, can. 1325 § 3).

56 "Etiam acatholici magnam colunt reverentiam erga Sanctam Sedem; et hic forsitan optimus fructus ex praesenti angustia est exortus. Hodie omnes fere oculos suae mentis in Ecclesiam dirigunt, quae sicut columna fidei et sicut petra spei et sicut ignis ardens caritatis in procellis et tempestatibus hodiernis revera est illa civitas coelestis super montes aeterna constructa, quae non potest abscondi quaerentium oculis. Quo fit, ut multi acatholici ecclesiae catholicae sensim approximent et religiosis colloquiis virorum eruditorum utriusque confessionis haud neglecto can. 1325 § 3 habitis non pauci protestantium scientia ac humanioribus praestantes sanctae matri ecclesiae reconcilientur. Quotum numerum iam de die in diem crescentem Spiritus Sanctus adaugeat multosque ad unitatem reducat, quae in beati Petri petra fundatur" (Paderborn 1948, 40).

Church. However, neither conversions nor efforts at theological dialogue are discussed in depth, and in fact no figures are provided to quantify the phenomenon of converts, a fact that certainly remains singular, given the predominantly 'statistical literary genre' of the *relationes ad limina*. Moreover, the phenomenon of conversions within the Jaeger-Stählin-Kreis, if any, must not have been widespread, if such conversations took place with the co-participation of the Oldenburg *Landesbischof*, which in that case would certainly not have consented to their continuation for so many years. In 1948, therefore, Jaeger spoke of the effort he had been personally undertaking for years in the field of specialised theological dialogue between the confessions, but concealed it under purposes that were certainly not directly related or in reality not so explicit. Significantly, in 1953 Jaeger devoted a few more lines to his activity as head of such theological sessions and more clearly explained that conversions were not so much a direct result of such activities:

Many non-Catholics, who are excellent in the religious and human sciences, are in favor of the Catholic Church and indeed a considerable number have returned to the unity of this Church. In religious discussions, which take place without disregarding canon 1325 §3 and according to the norms confirmed by the Apostolic See, even Protestant professors and other people of excellent learning know more the Catholic faith. And although they do not immediately embrace the faith of the Church, they nevertheless begin to appreciate it, and it can indeed be said that those certain Catholic doctrines, e.g., on the efficacy of the sacraments, on the inner sanctification of the justified man, on the tradition to be considered in addition to Scripture, are received with a devout spirit. Many Protestants also feel a kind of genuine reverence for the Holy See, which, like a rock unbroken by any storm, resists modern errors. The Catholic Church appears in the eyes of those who seek the truth as a banner raised among the nations and as that city set on a mountain, whose light cannot be hidden.⁵⁷

57 "Aatholicorum multi scientiis religiosis et humanioribus praestantes ecclesiae catholicae favent, immo spectabilis numerus ad unitatem huius ecclesiae rediit. Religiosis colloquiis, quae fiunt haud neglecto can. 1325 §3 et ad normas a Sede Apostolica comprobata, protestantium etiam professores alique scientia praeclari homines catholicam fidem melius noverunt. Et quamvis non statim fidem ecclesiae amplexerint, tamen illam aestimari incipiunt, et revera dici potest, illos quasdam catholicas doctrinas v.g. de sacramentorum efficacia, de interna hominis iustificati sanctificatione, de traditione praeter scripturam tenenda devota mente recepisse. Multi etiam protestantes quandam veram reverentiam sentiunt erga Sanctam Sedem, quae quasi petra nullis tempestatibus fracta erroribus modernis resistit. Ecclesia catholica quaerentium veritatem oculis apparet tamquam signum elevatum in nationibus et sicut illa civitas supra montem posita, cuius lux non potest abscondi" (Paderborn 1953, 42).

Jaeger probably felt protected in writing so because in 1950 the Holy Office's Instruction *Ecclesia Catholica* had appeared, which, expanding and correcting the 1948 *monitum*, constituted almost a handbook of norms for the activities of Catholic ecumenism in the dioceses.⁵⁸ *Ecclesia Catholica* delegated the responsibility of supervising local ecumenical activities to diocesan bishops, thus decentralising this control from the Holy See. Therefore, in his answer no. 100 Jaeger accompanied the mention of the theological dialogues by specifying that they were conducted in accordance with the norms issued by the Roman authority. What he did not add, however, was that it was precisely the German bishops, and Jaeger in the forefront, who had urged this instruction in 1950 at the Holy Office. In April 1949, indeed, Jaeger sent the theologian Josef Höfer as his emissary to Rome, who negotiated with the Holy Office a list of norms *ad experimentum*, i.e., provisional, which the German bishops would have to adhere to for the continuation of ecumenical activities in their dioceses. These instructions received *pro tempore* would later be confirmed in the instruction *Ecclesia Catholica* promulgated at the end of the same year but only published in March 1950.⁵⁹

In both Jaeger's *relationes*, from 1948 and 1953, these references to the theological dialogue, being brief and not providing in-depth details on the subject, are once again disproportionate to the real extent of the ecumenical commitment in Paderborn. But this also applies to the *relationes* of other dioceses that were in the forefront of the ecumenical field, whose silences, in addition to the lack of explicit mention of ecumenism, must also be evaluated. It is significant, for example, that none of them, among the moral dangers threatening the population, ever listed contamination with other Christian denominations due to forced cohabitation, something that other bishops might instead have passionately denounced, one of whom was the Bishop of Freiburg im Breisgau Conrad Gröber, who died in February 1948 and who had sent a memorandum to Rome on this subject in 1943.⁶⁰ These elements would seem to support the presumption of an attitude of prudence adopted by Jaeger and other bishops in addressing the canonical *relatio ad limina* to the consistory congregation. To make a quick comparison, it is useful to look at how the Bishop of Mainz Albert Stohr answered the same question no. 100.

Stohr, on 22 December 1951, had personally obtained permission from Pius XII to ordain to the priesthood the first married priest of the Latin Church, the 71-year-old Rudolf Goethe. Three years later, he would ordain another, 43-year-old Otto Melchers, at the time of Goe-

⁵⁸ SO, "Ecclesia Catholica", 20 December 1949.

⁵⁹ On this see: Marotta, *Gli anni della pazienza*, 124-31.

⁶⁰ Ernesti, *Ökumene im Dritten Reich*, 346-68.

the's ordination already in the seminary. In both cases, they were former Lutheran pastors who had converted and were still happily married: the international echo was huge.⁶¹ These conversions, among other things, came from the activities of the 'Braunshardt conferences', a theological circle of dialogue between Catholics and Protestants that took place under Stohr's patronage, even though, in terms of modality, it was more akin to the activities of the Una Sancta Movement than Jaeger's *Kreis*.⁶² Yet, Stohr made no mention at all of the conferences nor of the ordinations of Goethe in his 1953 *relatio*, not even with regard to questions 29, 51 and 52 on priestly ordinations or particular personal situations that caused scandal among the faithful: questions in which, on the contrary, he was prodigal with details, providing the name and surname of a long list of priests who, as the curia official in charge of studying the *relationes* commented, had by then "crossed the Rubicon", especially because they had abandoned celibacy.⁶³ This silence can perhaps be explained by the extreme prudence required to avoid compromising the ordination of Melchers – who was younger than Goethe and who also had four children – which was to take place on 1 August of that year, a few months after the *ad limina* visit. Besides, also Jaeger, in his *relatio* of that year, made no mention at all of the imminent ordination in his diocese on 19 December 1953 of the former pastor Martin Giebner, who was also married.

It was only in 1958, and precisely in the context of question no. 100, that Stohr finally mentioned the activities of these two former pastors become Catholic priests who, among other things, had opened a *Haus der Begegnung* in 1954, known as 'Domus Pacis', dedicated to the catechesis of converts, running it together with their wives. It is a courageous mention that makes no secret of the identity of the two priests who ruled the house, nor of the co-participation of the wives (at least the oldest one, Goethe's almost 80-year-old wife, is mentioned). Still, it is curious that Stohr had already finished drafting the *relatio* once again without mentioning the activities of these two *sui generis* priests, deciding only at the last moment to add a page 19-bis to the report in which he included a final paragraph to answer no. 100:

Allow me to add a few things regarding a certain institution called the 'Domus Pacis'. This house, located near the cathedral, was intended for the benefit of those who have endeavored to convert their faith, i.e. the '*Konvertiten*', or those who waver in religious matters and sincerely seek the truth, called 'seekers' (*Suchende*).

⁶¹ Stohr, Letter to Pius XII, 28-10-1950. Cf. Marotta, *Gli anni della pazienza*, 150-8 and Goethe, "Die Offene Tür". See also Hell, "Ein Erinnerungsort", 490-3.

⁶² Braun, "Stohrs praktische Arbeit".

⁶³ Anonymous comment in Mainz 1953, 25.

In this house, work those two priests, who, although they were once heretical ministers and are still married, nevertheless, having obtained permission from the Holy See a few years earlier, were promoted to the sacrament of Holy Orders. The wife of one of them, now in old age and not burdened with children, helps the two priests in the training of the newly converted. The number of these converts in the house each year reaches more or less fifty. The younger of these two priests has begun pastoral work with out-of-town converts in the scattered villages of the diocese, where he will be able to work with better fruit than any other priest equally engaged in this field.⁶⁴

6 Conclusion

At the end of this analysis of the traces of ecumenism in the German *relationes*, the fundamental question to be asked concerns the origin of the omissions and silences detected, which produced an undeniable discrepancy between the portrait and the diocesan reality portrayed. At least in the cases of Mainz and Paderborn, it can be excluded a lack of sensitivity by the ordinary to the ecumenical theme, which can instead be assumed for other cases, such as Augsburg and Passau, for example. Were these silences, therefore, the effect of the limitation inherent in the 'literary genre' of the *relationes ad limina*, i.e., the constraint to the 1918 questionnaire, written when ecumenism was not an emergency? Was it rather a measure of 'prudence'?

With regard to the *relationes* sent by Jaeger concerning the diocese of Paderborn, a datum found directly in the archives of the Holy Office provides some clarity, indicating, among other things, that Fouilloux was not mistaken in guessing that Lorenz Jaeger's *visit ad limina* was the trigger for the *monitum* of June 1948. Indeed, the archives of the Supreme Congregation show how Jaeger, during that Roman visit, was also received by the authorities of the Holy Office and delivered a second report, completely independent of the *rela-*

⁶⁴ "Adhuc pauca adicere mihi liceat quae pertinent ad institutionem quandam quam 'Domus pacis' vocant. Haec domus prope ecclesiam cathedralem sita destinata est in favorem eorum qui fidem suam convertere nituntur v.d. 'Konvertiten' vel eorum qui in rebus religiosis vacillantes veritatem sincere quaerunt, 'Suchende' nuncupati. Qua in domo illi duo sacerdotes operam dant, qui etsi quondam ministri haeretici etiam nunc uxorati, tamen licentia a Sancta Sede obtenta annis nonnullis ante ad sacramentum ordinis profecti sunt. Alterius uxor aetate iam declivis nec liberis gravata duos sacerdotes in neo-convertendis instruendis adjuvat. Numerus ista in domo conversorum quotannis plus minusve quinquaginta attingit. Iunior ex his duobus sacerdotibus laborem circa conversos extra urbem in pagis dioecesis dissitis susceperit, ubi meliore fructu operam navare poterit quam quivis alius sacerdos in hac materia haud pari modo versatus" (Mainz 1953, 19bis).

tio ad limina delivered to the consistory, specifically concerning “the mutual contact between Protestants and Catholics in Germany after 1945” (“de contact mutuo inter protestantes et catholicos Germaniae inde a 1945”).⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the text is not to be found in the Roman archives and must still be sought in those of the diocese of Paderborn. However, it can nevertheless be deduced that it was a decisive text, since it was in commentary on this text that consultor Sebastiaan Tromp drafted a *Votum* on 2 June 1948, which was presented a few days later to the cardinals who were members of the Holy Office in a session that ultimately decided on the publication of the *monitum* (“Many conferences are held in complete independence of the bishops [...] indeed they are generally dangerous”, pointed out an alarmed Tromp).⁶⁶

Jaeger had thus provided the Roman authorities with a long and detailed report on the activities of German Catholic ecumenism, which probably also included the activities carried out in his diocese. From Tromp’s *Votum*, it can be deduced that Jaeger in that report had also spoken about the case of converted pastors who were candidates for the priesthood. The archbishop, however, had not mentioned this further report in his *relatio ad limina*, not even to refer to it to complete the information provided. Comparison then between the 1948 text and the 1953 version excludes the possibility that the 1948 *relatio* deliberately omitted information in order to include it in the special report, as the text of the 1953 does not differ significantly from the 1948 one.

It therefore seems that, at least as far as Jaeger is concerned, the reasons for the ‘silences’ in the *relationes ad limina* can be traced back mainly to a problem of ‘literary genre’, that is, to the main purpose of the *relationes*, which rather than providing a complete snapshot of the state and activity of the diocese had to focus on statistical data, on figures regarding access to the sacraments, and thus justify the lower frequency of the Easter precept by referring to the spread of indifferentism and materialist ideology among the faithful. Finally, the problem of the ‘recipient’ should probably not be underestimated either. Up until 1951, in his dealings with the Roman authorities, Jaeger had taken advice from a consultor of the Holy Office, the Paderbornian Josef Grendel. The latter, as to the best way to report on ecumenical activities in the diocese, had advised Jaeger to keep a low profile, i.e., that it was “sufficient to report briefly on the participants and the outcome of the meetings. Too detailed an account would only provoke unnecessary questions from some of the people

⁶⁵ Tromp, *Votum*, 1.

⁶⁶ “Multa colloquia fieri prorsus indipendenter ab Episcopis [...] immo ea generalim esse periculosa” (Tromp, *Votum*, 1-2).

who will receive these reports”.⁶⁷ One may thus wonder whether the norm of ‘avoiding unnecessary questions’ may have been a criterion for the drafting of the *relationes ad limina* by those bishops who wished to ‘protect’ experimental or particularly sensitive experiences in their dioceses.

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⁶⁷ “Es genüge, bloß die Teilnehmer und das Ergebnis der Tagung kurz zu berichten. Ein zu ausföhrlicher Bericht, so meinte er, würde nur Anlaß bieten zu unnötigen Rückfragen von Seiten einiger Herren, welche diese Berichte vorgelegt bekämen” (Jaeger to Bea 31-03-1951, in Marotta, *Gli anni della pazienza*, 600).

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Notes about the Uses of the *relationes ad limina* Produced During the Pontificate of Pius XII

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Abstract The value of *ad limina relationes* as source documents has been widely enhanced by historiographical research. These sources are capable of returning valuable information about the life of the diocese as well as the biography of the bishops who compiled it. The *relationes* compiled between 1945 and 1958 have the ability to offer valuable information on an ecclesial situation marked by the theme of reconstruction: not only material, but also in the sense of a redefinition of the core values of the society. In this way, through the *relationes*, it is possible to ascertain how the great slogans and the great ideas of the pontificate of Pius XII have actually been received locally.

Keywords Pius XII. *Relationes ad limina*. Roman Catholic church. Roman Curia. Dioceses. Morality. Politics. Papacy.

Summary 1 The Origin. – 2 The Test Case of the Pontificate of Pius XII. – 3 The *relationes* as Sources.



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1 The Origin

It is almost impossible to reckon how many times the scholars who have used the *relationes ad limina* – sometimes editing the text in its entirety – have extolled the extraordinary informative value represented by this kind of historical source. If this consideration has an undoubted foundation, up to the point of becoming obvious, nevertheless the use of *relationes* for research purposes constantly imposes on the scholar a full awareness of the origin and of the purposes assigned to this informative tool over the centuries.¹ Firstly, by noting the historical origins of this source, that certainly has received a fundamental impulse from the Council of Trent, but which has its roots in the fourth century. The practice of the visit *ad limina* originated from the obligation that the suffragan bishops had to take part in the synod that every year was celebrated in the metropolitan see;² from there a constant and irreversible process has led to a practice that, extending the local obligations, has induced the bishops to establish a peculiar relationship with the bishop of Rome. The important evolutions that had occurred since the age of Constantine had placed the bishop of Rome in a position of particular authority, strengthened by the increasingly frequent visits made by the bishops to the tombs of the apostles preserved in the city: in fact, these visits became the immediate opportunity to brief the bishop of Rome on what had happened in the local churches and to receive from him, if necessary, useful advice; but it is also clear that this practice became increasingly necessary and binding as soon as Christianity had developed from a localised and restricted movement into a widespread phenomenon, that had received important guarantees from the imperial authority and that, above all, had by now matured a consciousness of itself as of a reality bound by a sense of communion and that consequently felt the need to express itself through a uniformity of doctrines and practices.

The sources we have speak eloquently of this mutation of accent: the opportunity to visit Rome had gradually become a necessity and the visit was no longer a simple option, but an obligation regulated by increasingly precise rules. The letter that the Synod of Sardica of 342-343 had sent to Pope Julius revealed, twenty years after the Nicene Council, how much the bishops considered it of the utmost importance to update the bishop of Rome on what was happening in their dioceses.³ Then in 447 Pope Leo, in a letter addressed to

¹ Cf. Carrol, *The Bishop's Quinquennial Report*; Cárcel Ortí, "La visita 'ad limina apostolorum Petri et Pauli'"; Cárcel Ortí, Cárcel Ortí, *Historia, Derecho y Diplomática*; Ricciardi Celsi, *Le relationes ad limina*.

² Cf. Sägmüller, "Die Visitatio liminum".

³ Synodi Sardicensis, "Epistola ad Julium".

the bishops of Sicily, prescribed that three of them were required to come on 29 September of each year to Rome to attend the synod that the pope would convoke on the anniversary of his election.⁴ Gregory the Great established, with respect to this latter case, that the visit of the bishops, instead of every three years, should happen every five years.⁵ Michele Maccarrone observed that acting in this way,

It was thus created between the pope and the bishops of his province (that extended from the Apennines to Sicily) a completely new and unique relationship in the canonical order of the Church, which was based on the same root of the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome, because they came to his seat to venerate the Apostle of whom he was the vicar and whose succession continued, in a conceptual and religious identification between *sedes apostolica* and *limina apostolorum*.⁶

Two centuries later, the Roman Synod of June 743, presided over by Pope Zacharias, decreed that the bishops ordained in Rome should go to the *Urbe* on 15 May each year to make their visit *ad limina apostolorum*: and if the distance from Rome did not allow it, they could replace their visit by sending a written report,⁷ for all the other bishops were instead the rules agreed at the time of ordination to define specifically the respective obligations.

When the Gregorian Reform (or rather Revolution) affirmed the principle of *Libertas Ecclesiae*, the visits became a valuable tool for a papacy that, facing the break with the East and the dialectic that had opened with the imperial power, aspired to enshrine its centrality in the Church as well as in society. One therefore understands the very particular insistence that Gregory VII dedicated to the obligation of the visit, thus binding also the conferral of the pallium to the obligation of the latter's fulfilment. And it is precisely in one of his Roman synods, the one celebrated in 1079, that a formula of oath was also defined that bound the newly appointed bishops to the ob-

⁴ Cf. Leo I, "(192) Universos episcopos per Siciliam constitutos".

⁵ Pope Gregory to the deacon Cyprian, May 597, in Gregorio Magno, *Lettere (IV-VII)*, 447. Gregory the Great also established that the visit took place on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul.

⁶ Maccarrone, "Ubi est papa, ibi est Roma", 372: "si creava così tra il papa ed vescovi della sua provincia (che si estendeva dagli Appennini alla Sicilia) un rapporto del tutto nuovo e singolare nell'ordinamento canonico della Chiesa, che traeva motivo dalla medesima radice della giurisdizione del vescovo di Roma, perché si veniva alla sua sede per venerare l'Apostolo di cui era il vicario e del quale continuava la successione, in una identificazione concettuale e religiosa tra *sedes apostolica* e *limina apostolorum*". Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

⁷ Boncompagni, "Roma (Romanum), Concilio di", 193.

servance of the obligation of the visit.⁸ By the end of the first millennium of the Christian era it was clear for all the people that the ancient practice of the visit carried out as a spontaneous and optional act of devotion to the Apostles Peter and Paul had only remained the outer shell: the *ad limina* visit now primarily aimed at the meeting with the pope and the reporting of the life of the dioceses and had become a part of the duties that qualified the bishops as such. This development became even more evident when Pope Paschal II (1099-1118) replied to the archbishop-elect of Split in Dalmatia – who was objecting to the request to swear to the obligation of the visit – that this was a “common obligation” so that it was fulfilled even by the bishops who lived in the most distant regions of central and northern Europe, if not directly then at least through delegates.⁹

Between the twelfth and fifteenth century the tightening of the norms relating to the visit also determined an evolution in the way of its fulfilment by the bishops. When the *ad limina* visit ceased to be an act of religious devotion and became the accomplishment of an administrative practice, the bishops also realised that their direct point of contact had changed. It was no longer the pope, the successor of Peter, but the bureaucratic apparatus that assisted him in the government of the Church. And it was Ugucione of Pisa, in a passage of his *Summa* on the *Decretum*, who effectively described the evolution of the purpose of the visit: the tombs of the Apostles were no longer even identifiable in a place, but in a metaphysical space circumscribed by the presence of the Roman Curia: “*Liminibus: idem intelligo si curie romane, ubicumque sit*”.¹⁰ And when shortly later Innocent IV struggled with the problem of legitimising his status as a pope who had momentarily moved together with his Curia to Lyons, he reaffirmed that “*limina ibi esse intelliguntur ubi papa est*”.¹¹ The Roman Curia tightened the control over the bishops which led to an increase in episcopal attempts to evade the obligations of the visit by requesting – and in many cases receiving – a dispensation allowing the obligation of the visit to be fulfilled by sending a written report. However, this practice spread so uncontrollably that in 1257 Pope Alexander IV decided to revoke all the derogations granted so far, restoring the ancient practice of the annual visit made by the bishop himself.¹² The peremptory nature of the directives of the pontiffs was eloquent of the difficulty of the practice of the visit, that bishops preferred to replace by send-

⁸ “Apostolorum limina singulis annis aut per me aut per certum nuncium meum visitabo, nisi eorum absolver licentia”, *Liber Extra*, X 2.24.4, *Corpus iuris canonici*, col. 360.

⁹ Congregazione per i vescovi, *Direttorio per la visita 'ad limina'*, 671.

¹⁰ Maccarrone, “Ubi est papa, ibi est Roma”, 376.

¹¹ Cf. Melloni, *Innocenzo IV*, 81.

¹² Manselli, “Alessandro IV, papa”.

ing a written report. The centuries immediately preceding the Council of Trent were in fact those in which the practice of the visit seemed to disappear.¹³ Thus in 1540 some bishops addressed Pope Paul III to ask for a definitive exemption from the visit, resorting to the argument that it caused damage to the pastoral care by demanding an absence from the diocese;¹⁴ a kind of reasoning that, as it is easy to imagine, was likely to impress the pontiff who only a few years before had encouraged the drafting of the *Consilium de emendanda ecclesia*. At the Council of Trent there was an attempt to repeat these petitions, but they were not heard. A line was clearly drawn: for a church that was marching in the direction of a deep reorganisation of its structures and that aspired to the definition of a Roman model to be applied universally, it was urgent for the bishops to maintain constant and systematic relations with the bishop of Rome and his Curia.¹⁵ With the bull *Romanus Pontifex* of 20 December 1587, Pope Sixtus V fixed the norms relating to the visit, explaining his intention to restore what had been established in ancient times and scrupulously observed for many centuries. The episcopate was bound by an oath to the fulfilment of the *ad limina* visit within the terms established by the Apostolic See, which could change from three to five years, depending on the distance of the diocese from Rome; the report that would accompany the visit should give informations on the state of the local Church and on the material and spiritual conditions of the clergy and people of the diocese; it was also foreseen that, in case of impediment, the report would be forwarded through a delegate of the bishop: but it had to be clear to everyone that all these exceptions had to be duly documented. In the constitution *Immensa aeterni Dei* of 1588, Pope Sixtus established that it would be the congregation of the Council to watch over the respect of this obligation by the bishops and to study and store the reports that would have been sent to Rome.

Once restored the practice of the visit, the new question was to establish the exact quality of the informations to be transmitted to Rome using the *relationes*. Pope Sixtus had given no indication in this regard and even if some more diligent bishop, as Charles Borromeo, had been careful to define a spectrum of informations appropriate to Roman expectations, the average reporting quality was overall un-

¹³ Ottavio Cavalleri ("Visite pastorali", 101) states in this regard that "the ancient custom of visiting the sacred limini had almost ceased at the beginning of the sixteenth century" ("la consuetudine antichissima di visitare i sacri limini era pressoché cessata agli inizi del Cinquecento").

¹⁴ Pater, *Die Bischöfliche Visitatio*, 85.

¹⁵ "The *ad limina* visits will prove to be a very effective instrument of homogenization of the episcopal body and of Roman centralization" ("Le visite *ad limina* si riveleranno uno strumento molto efficace di omogeneizzazione del corpo episcopale e di centralizzazione romana") (Venard, "Il concilio Lateranense V e il Tridentino", 363).

satisfactory.¹⁶ Through subsequent focuses it was therefore foreseen that the report would be divided into two parts: the first one was to deal with the ‘material’ state of the diocese, offering quantitative information about existing churches and oratories, monasteries, pawnshops, hospitals and fraternities; the second one had to be dedicated to the ‘formal’ state, focusing on the pastoral dimension and giving news on the adaptation of the diocesan reality to the *decreta* of the Tridentine, with respect to the celebration of the diocesan and provincial synod, the conclusion of the pastoral visit and to institution of the seminary; this second section should also offer information about the respect of the obligation of residence by the bishop¹⁷ and the work undertaken in order to fight the spread of heresies. However, in most cases the *relationes* were evasive and many bishops, in spite of the advice given in large part of the treatises on the episcopal office, were limited to an act of homage and greeting to the pontiff. Benedict XI-II tried to remedy this situation by presenting a detailed questionnaire in 1725, especially for the so-called ‘formal’ aspect, which also left room for bishops to report on topics outside the official grid of questions.¹⁸ Even more decisive was the intervention of Pope Benedict XIV, to whose methodical mind it had not escaped that the great part of the *relationes* that reached Rome were abundant as to “superfluis” and “deficientes in necessariis”.¹⁹ Pope Lambertini insisted on the importance of the duty of compiling the *relationes* in the treatise *de Synodo dioecesisana* of 1748²⁰ and redefined the terms of delivery, specifying that the bishops of the Italian Peninsula and of the adjacent islands would have to send it every three years, while for the other bishops there was a five-year deadline. And in order to be more confident of the fulfilment of this obligation, in 1740 Benedict XIV had decided that from that moment the *relationes* should be examined by the congregation on the State of the Churches (the so called ‘Concilietto’), a light structure that had to interact more frequently with the pope, and whose members – as well as the prefect and the secretary – came from the same congregation of the Council. The ‘Concilietto’ enlisted also the help of the Secretary of the Latin Letters, who was entrusted with the task – once the analysis of the *relationes* had been completed – of drafting the roman answers for the bishops. The radical changes that occurred in decades following the French Revolution and the drastic spending review imposed by Napoleon on ec-

¹⁶ For an initial assessment of the decisions taken by Pope Sixtus see Robres Lluch, Castell Maiques, “La visita ‘ad limina’”.

¹⁷ See now Wiesner, *Tridentinisches Papsttum*.

¹⁸ Turchini, “Visite ad limina”, 614.

¹⁹ “Instructio Sacrae Congregationis Concilii”, 665.

²⁰ For this particular aspect, see Fattori, “Acciò i vescovi latini”.

clesiastical institutions highlighted how the structure of the questionnaire for the *relationes* needed an adjustment. This question was also raised at the Vatican Council of 1869-70, but its sudden interruption prevented it from reforming the existing legislation.²¹

Only with the curial reform of Pius X in 1908 a revision of the norms relating to *ad limina* visits was enacted. The entire handling of this topic was transferred from the Congregation of the Council (and of the 'Concilietto') to the Consistorial Congregation, which was destined to play a leading role in the Curia of Pius X.²² With the decree *De relationibus dioecesanis et visitatione SS. Liminum*, addressed in 1909 "to all Ordinaries not subject to the Sacred congregation of propaganda fide", the Consistorial Congregation established that the *ad limina* visit was obligatory for all bishops every five years from 1 January 1911. Attached to this decree was an *Ordo servandus in relatione de statu ecclesiarum* which developed in 150 points the themes that the reports should deal with.²³ The *Codex iuris canonici* of 1917 sanctioned these new rules in canons 340-342, making clear that the presentation of the report was one of the fundamental obligations of the bishop as defined by the Council of Trent: specifically the drafting and sending of the report was to be considered more important than the visit of the tombs of the Apostles. In 1918 the Consistorial Congregation realised a new questionnaire, divided into 100 points;²⁴ in 1922 was added a version structured in 90 points for the Churches that fell within the competence of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide;²⁵ these last acts defined the legal boundaries within which the bishops would prepare their reports during the pontificate of Pius XII.

2 The Test Case of the Pontificate of Pius XII

The sample of reports considered here offers the possibility for some general considerations, both under the aspect of national representation, and of the particular perspective of the authors, who were not only engaged as diocesan ordinaries.²⁶ The first concerns the

²¹ Congregazione per i vescovi, *Direttorio per la visita 'ad limina'*, 675.

²² Cf. Vian, "Convergenze e divergenze".

²³ Congregatio Consistorialis, "De relationibus dioecesanis et visitatione". It should be remembered that, in addition to this, Pius X had also prescribed also to the bishops the sending of detailed reports dedicated to reporting on what was done to contain the modernist threat: Diegues, "Tra competenze e procedure".

²⁴ Congregatio Consistorialis, "De relationibus dioecesanis".

²⁵ Congregatio De Propaganda Fide, "De relationibus missionum".

²⁶ I am referring here to the reports presented during the seminar held at Ca' Foscari on 1 June 2022, dedicated to *The Church of Pius XII after the Second World War (1945-1958): the ad limina relationes as sources of historiographical reflection*; in this seminar

external configuration of this documentary material determined by the questionnaire, which had been introduced to counter reports that were evasive and verbose on less sensitive topics that were not of particular relevance for the Roman See. The questionnaire addressed the need for a classification of the information in order to facilitate subsequent Roman control. But no less important was the need to produce, through answers determined by particular questions, an image of the Church that was as uniform as possible everywhere, according to a need that from the Council of Trent onwards was seen as indispensable. The same problem arose when the consultation of the episcopate was launched during the pre-preparatory phase of Vatican II: in this case, however, it was John XXIII himself who decided to deviate from the curial rule and to abandon the questionnaire in favor of an open consultation. It goes without saying that when *relationes* are produced in such different contexts – to mention only the difference between the Spanish and the Scandinavian case – all the impracticability of a uniform approach emerges. So the only truly common element is given by the length of these texts, determined precisely by the extension of the questionnaires employed. Even with respect to the language – the legislation required strictly Latin – there are some interesting exceptions, as in the French case: here we are in fact in the presence of bishops who are real national monuments, after years of resistance to the Nazi occupation, and who choose *motu proprio* the national language, and do so without any embarrassment, for the compilation of the *relatio*. Still with respect to a more external dimension, it is possible to observe that in some cases the sample considered is numerically reduced, as for the *relationes* coming from the Patriarchate of Venice; in other cases, such as for the Yugoslav one, the reduction is induced by compulsion: the bishops had rare and infrequent communications with Rome, and the State authorities did not allow them to leave the national territory. But also in this case we ascertain the truth of what Delio Cantimori, later quoted by Giovanni Miccoli, said about the relevance of

have spoken: Carlo Urbani, “Riverire e riferire? Temi e problemi dalle *relationes ad limina* per un profilo dell’episcopato italiano nel secondo dopoguerra”; Patrizia Luciani, “Il ‘progressivism gallicum’ nelle *relationes ad limina* francesi e belghe fra 1947 e 1957”; Enrico Baruzzo, “Tra desideri di restaurazione cattolica e segnali di secolarizzazione: la Spagna degli anni Quaranta e Cinquanta vista attraverso le *relationes ad limina* di alcuni vescovi iberici”; Daiana Menti, “Le missioni cattoliche in Scandinavia: un bilancio nelle *relationes ad limina* a Propaganda Fide (1948-1958)”; Ivan Portelli, “Tra repressione e difesa: la situazione della Chiesa cattolica nella Jugoslavia comunista dalle *relationes ad limina* (1946-1958)”; Francesco Tacchi, “Le *relationes ad limina* dei vescovi tedeschi: i problemi della ricostruzione e l’avvento della società del benessere (1948-1958)”; Saretta Marotta, “Le tracce della questione ecumenica nelle *relationes ad limina* dei vescovi tedeschi (1948-1958)”; Valentina Ciciliot, “La chiesa cattolica statunitense nel secondo dopoguerra: lo sguardo delle *relationes ad limina* (1949-1954)”.

the ‘glimpse’ as a useful perspective to focus on broader and complex scenarios.²⁷ One last consideration, always linked to a more external perspective, concerns the periodisation. If choosing the period of time between the end of the Second World War and the end of the pontificate of Pius XII has some plausibility, it is also evident that it is a model that does not fit all sizes: just think of the Spanish case, where clearly the most effective periodisation is quite different from the one that suits the countries directly affected by the War.

With regard to the content of the reports, it is possible to isolate at least some major common topics. First and foremost it is interesting to record how all the *relationes* certify the elimination of modernism: the great ‘adversary’ of the early twentieth century had therefore finally been eradicated, to the point that there was really little to say beyond this. So the great question that arose after the end of the War was the ‘rebuilding’. And for many bishops this reconstruction is necessary as much on a material as on a moral level. There are prelates who propose a reconstruction that proceeds from different premises than in the past, in order to be more effective. But, as regards to the Italian case – and not only this one –, a reader of the *relationes* could easily get the impression that the Catholic Church was coming out of the War more or less as it had entered into it: strenuously defending private property, seeking and gaining the support of the small and medium bourgeoisie and adopting a paternalistic attitude that has the taste, above all, of self-sufficiency in front of its responsibilities in the political developments of previous years. Even for Spain, which in other aspects is so different in comparison to the sample considered, the theme of rebuilding is treated both from a material and on a more spiritual level. The Civil War had left deep wounds to which was added an economic situation that required the episcopate to pay particular attention to social emergencies, ranging from lack of housing to a more widespread impoverishment of large sections of society. While on a theoretical level it was proposed to find the solutions to these problems by deepening the elements of the social doctrine of the Church, on a more practical level the bishops pointed to the intensification of charitable activity, e.g., through the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul. But the Spanish bishops also reported what they did with respect to the procurement of housing, the distribution of medicines and the establishment of professional laboratories. The Yugoslav bishops, however, were precluded from this concept of rebuilding: their dioceses were in the practical impossibility, due to statal requisitions, to repair the buildings damaged by the war. The Scandinavian and American cases are even more different. Scandinavia belonged to the territories under the ju-

²⁷ Battelli, “In difesa della storia”, 374.

risdiction of the Propaganda Fide, but it is clear that it was a missionary territory with characteristics very different from the other regions subject to this congregation: in a region that was characterised by welfare states, it is clear that, with regard to rebuilding, a small Catholic Church could not offer anything attractive. The same can be affirmed for the United States in which Catholicism did not constitute a small minority as in Scandinavia, but which differently from Europe had not known the ravages of war on their territory. American bishops thus defined the task of the rebuilding as a reconstruction of the Christian culture, that was essential to counter both secularism and communism.

The *relationes* provided also informations on the reality of the parishes, the pivot around which the entire functioning of the local Churches revolved. The bishops remarked on the foundation of new parishes, suggesting that this demonstrated the social relevance that the Church had acquired. In the United States, where Catholicism was experiencing a significant growth, the reflections about the parishes were combined with the request for an adequate recognition of the importance of Catholic schools: according to the bishops this ancient matter was now managed with less hostility by the Government than in the past. Surprisingly the triumphalistic tones adopted by some bishops are not found in the Spanish *relationes*: in this case, the bishops showed a certain awareness that behind the apparent solidity of the parishes there was only a certain sluggish persistence of Catholic worship. In the Scandinavian countries, the perspective was naturally different: the questionnaire led in fact to a sort of frustration for some bishops that were asked to enlist schools, educational structures and parish associations. These prelates could do very little in a situation where Catholicism had few personnel – Jesuits will be banned until 1956 – and means. Yet, in spite of this situation, many bishops did not resize their ambitions: some of them pursued ephemeral dreams of conquest and expansion and others, more realistically, aimed above all to strengthen the existing structures. The evaluations on the parishes were then intertwined with those on the associations, which meant reporting almost exclusively on Catholic Action (with the exception of Yugoslavia, where it was forbidden, and Spain, where, alongside Catholic Action, the role of confraternities and third orders was valued). Both in Spain and Italy the bishops were giving detailed informations about the associative structures derived from Catholic Action, presenting them as suitable tools to involve the laity in the most different professional conditions. The analysis of the parish situation also included reporting on the frequency of the sacraments, one of the legacies of the ancient practice of pastoral visits following the Council of Trent. It is interesting to observe that in this case the bishops intertwined the data with sociological considerations, because they believed that only a complex

analysis would be able to find the most suitable solutions to the problems that were emerging in contexts where urbanisation had become a phenomenon that involved the Catholic community more and more.

With respect to the clergy the *relationes* insisted on the permanent validity of the Tridentine model, but also posed the question of developing a training method capable of reacting to novelties: this meant, among other things, planning a training that was no longer exclusively humanistic, but also open to new disciplines. The *relationes* then provided information on the changes and experiments that some bishops intended to promote in order to have a clergy more suited to the challenges of society. So, just staying on the French case, if it is clear that the events of the Mission de France and the Mission de Paris were widely reported with a certain pride by Cardinal Liénart, it is no less interesting to record the effervescence of the new forms of consecrated life, almost all defined by a strong social emphasis (think of the Petites Sœurs de Jésus or the Prado). These were initiatives that pushed for a greater involvement of the Church in new social realities: but precisely because they had arisen in the periphery, it was also possible to observe the caution adopted by Rome towards them. Downstream of formation and experimentations there was the question of the numerical size of the clergy, often described by bishops as too small compared to pastoral needs. Needless to say that any quantitative consideration had to be related to the actual number of faithful of the respective territories and that the small numbers of Scandinavia had, in this sense, a very different weight if proportioned to other nations. In Spain, for example, the bishops affirmed the urgency of strengthening a clergy reduced by the killings of the civil war and by the difficulties encountered by seminaries; the bishops of Yugoslavia – who also had the problem of homogenising a clergy who spoke different languages – complained about the problems posed by the government authorities to the training process of the clergy, which was nevertheless allowed. Many more problems stemmed from the question – typical of communist countries – of the adhesion of priests to the associations of the clergy which were promoted by the authorities and discouraged by the episcopate. In Scandinavia, however, it was above all the conflict that existed between the secular clergy and the clergy from religious orders that constituted a problem.

Under the chapter of *morality* the *relationes* summarised the concerns of the bishops for the difficulties encountered by Catholicism in a context in which the hegemonic position maintained for centuries was replaced by a dynamic of secularisation that was getting harder to contain. For some bishops, heralds of a season in which the Church was confident and free of uncertainties, the crisis could only arise from a lack of commitment; but for almost all the other bishops the problems were there and they were openly named: secularism, the

decadence of morals, widespread immorality, divorce, abortion (in Spain the ‘problem’ of homosexuality was also mentioned); and considerations often emerged from the *relationes* as to how these phenomena were more widespread in an urban rather than rural context. In Yugoslavia the bishops preferred the shortcut of blaming these problems on the effects of atheist propaganda, while in Spain the short-circuit communism-secularisation was avoided: in this country it was found rather that the growth of religious indifference went hand in hand with the improvement of economic conditions. In Italy, concerns were directed at the presence of the Allied troops and what could be derived from a moral point of view:²⁸ the widespread anguish among the bishops for the “ballomania” (dancing madness) was precisely one of the manifestations of this care; at the same time the spread of the cinemas was seen as worrying: and in fact priests who instead used it systematically were often branded as “progressives”; on the contrary, in the United States – with the great example of Fulton Sheen²⁹ – great openness was shown towards the mass media as tools to convey the Catholic message more quickly and widely. In Spain too were expressed concerns about tourism as an agent liable to introduce elements of decadence of morals: these fears had turned – once again – to cinema as well as to foreign literature, who were accused of promoting lifestyles dissonant from those advocated by the national Catholic model of Spain. The case of Scandinavia was quite different: in this region the secularisation was such a deep-rooted process that it did not even merit the elaboration of a strategy of opposition or containment; the most important thing was to protect the Catholic minority from the offensive of non-Catholics.

With regard to politics, the reports generally confirmed concerns about the spread of communism: in this case the bishops supported without problems a questionnaire that let emerge in several passages a strong anti-communist prejudicial. Then some bishops evoked the War as a moment in which the anti-communist commitment had

²⁸ It was expressive of this concern, translated however on an ecclesial level, what, in November 1946, had taken over the Christian Democrat deputy Giuseppe Dossetti, who in a confidential meeting had manifested a “certain discomfort in thinking that American Catholicity can soon acquire on the whole body of the Church an influence proportionate to the material means at its disposal and the organisational dynamism it can demonstrate, but not equally proportionate to his contemplative effort [...]; in short, I fear a little his superficiality, his optimism, the habit itself to an excessive ease of life” (“un certo disagio nel pensare che la *cattolicità americana* possa entro breve tempo acquistare sull’intero corpo della Chiesa una influenza proporzionata ai mezzi materiali di cui può disporre e al dinamismo organizzativo di cui può dare prova, ma non altrettanto proporzionata al suo sforzo contemplativo [...]; insomma temo un po’ la sua superficialità, il suo ottimismo, l’abitudine stessa a una eccessiva facilità di vita”) (Pombeni, “Alle origini della proposta culturale”, 262-3).

²⁹ Cf. Ruozi, “The Arrival of Television”.

been dangerously relaxed. It should be noted, however, that the Italian bishops, unlike their German counterparts, abstained from any kind of reflection on the twenty years of fascist dictatorship. *Relationes* coming from Spain emphasised the defeat or reduction of the great opponents of Catholicism (freemasonry, liberalism and socialism); but it is certainly much more interesting to note that Spanish bishops also mentioned the existence of spaces for reflection and socialization that would be fundamental for the approach of Spain to democracy. And while elsewhere members of the Catholic Action were prevented from acting directly in the political sphere, in Spain, since 1945, some members of Catholic Action had been involved in the government and were decisive for initiating the process that would lead to the conclusion of the Concordat of 1953. It is clear that the case of Yugoslavia presented exactly the opposite: here the *relationes* are of particular interest for their ability to reconstruct a more complex situation, often hidden by the story of cardinal Stepinac: the Yugoslav Church was in fact committed to finding a *modus vivendi* with respect to the communist regime and do this while taking into account different linguistic affiliations, different jurisdictions (some dioceses were still under the control of Propaganda Fide) and an absolutely differentiated presence on the territory; it was therefore a Church committed to facing the prohibition of worship (including singing) and requisitioning of immovable property; to these problems were added the difficulties of relations with Orthodoxy and Islam.

3 The *relationes* as Sources

The decisions following the Council of Trent about the sending of *relationes ad limina*, especially after the definition of a binding questionnaire on all matters, has led to the accumulation of an enormous documentary material already extensively scanned and evaluated by historians.³⁰ The work carried out so far has made it clear that the *relationes* have been useful first of all to know the story of the bishops, to reconstruct their biography and to ascertain how they have fulfilled their pastoral service. They are therefore necessary to reconstruct the history of the dioceses and represent a seismograph that, with a sufficiently frequent frequency, has allowed us to appreciate how the fault lines of the local Churches have moved over the centu-

³⁰ Here, I recall just Tacchella, *Il cattolicesimo in Albania*; Pagano, Castaldo, "Le visite *ad limina apostolorum*"; Conzemius, *Die Berichte "ad limina"*; Camus Ibacache, "La visita *ad limina*"; Billanovich, "Le 'relationes ad limina' di Gregorio Barbarigo"; Caridi, "Chiesa e società nella diocesi di Santa Severina"; Barrado Barquilla, "Las visitas *ad limina* del Obispo"; Le "relationes ad limina" dei vescovi di Trento; *Les chemins de Rome*; Le visite "ad Limina Apostolorum" dei vescovi di Bergamo.

ries. The *relationes* are also important to clarify if and how a certain model of Church and bishop as they were designed by the Council of Trent, have been effectively implemented at the local level: because even in the time of Pius XII this was undoubtedly the model of reference. The vast amount of *relationes* that has accumulated over time represents a historiographical challenge that can be faced today in a different way from the past. What was previously determined by the constraints of print production can be fundamentally rethought in the era of databases: from this point of view the project coordinated by Hubert Wolf concerning the digital edition of the reports of the Nuncio Pacelli could be a reference model for an increasingly extensive sampling of *relationes*.³¹

Another issue concerns the periodisation to be followed in the analysis of the *relationes*. The opening of the Vatican Apostolic Archives according to the duration of the pontificates leads spontaneously to give, at least concerning the *terminus ad quem*, precise boundaries to such samples. But the concentration on a pontificate must be combined with the awareness of its specific problems. Although there is no doubt that the episcopate is (always) more or less receptive to the guidelines of a pontificate (at least formally under the aspect of its great slogans, as emerges from the production of pastoral letters),³² at the same time it is clear that there are other deeper dynamics, that escape the constraints determined by the *desiderata* of a pontiff. So as well in the history of dioceses as within the Roman Curia it is possible to observe a dialectic and resistance, sometimes very persistent, compared to the line drawn by a single pope. For this reason it is also necessary to consider carefully whether the *relationes* reflect exactly the requests posed by the questionnaire or if they deviate – and in which dimension – from it.

Since they are a source which has already been extensively examined in historical terms, the *ad limina relationes* have been the object of several evaluations. After the first opening of the Vatican Secret Archives these source documents were the subject of an interesting debate between Joseph Schmidlin and Johann Loserth: while Schmidlin stressed the importance of *relationes* as sources for the reconstruction of German history, Loserth expressed a fundamental disagreement, judging that the official nature of this source undermined its effective informative value.³³ This debate drew a long succession

³¹ Cf. *Kritische Online-Edition der Nuntiaturberichte*.

³² On the structural characteristics of this source, please refer to the introduction by Daniele Menozzi to *Lettere pastorali dei vescovi*, XI-XXXII.

³³ Cf. Schmidlin, *Die kirchlichen Zustände*; for the reply of Loserth see the review of Schmidlin's work published on the *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 11, 1910, 125-30. On the same line as Loserth took place later Caiazza, "Una fonte 'a responsabilità limitata'?".

of other interventions, until the moment when an intermediate evaluation emerged, far from uncritical glorification and dismantling. Therefore the *relationes* are not comparable to public documents that have legal value; but it is equally clear that they are texts compiled by someone who is placed in a subordinate position with respect to the recipient, with all the consequences that can come from this kind of relationship. The value of this source – just as it happens for all the others – must be weighted case by case, resorting to the necessary crossings with the other documents at our disposal.

The *relationes* return us data that maintain their objectivity (such as the number of priests, religious, churches and monasteries, the presence of a seminary, the charitable activities or the celebration of the synod); but when they report on pastoral activity they need to be examined with particular vigilance and critical sense: because as happens to the prefects who send their reports to the central Government, when they are addressing Rome, bishops tend to emphasise their successes or to accentuate the difficulties encountered to justify their failures. Therefore *relationes* have value above all for themselves: because they are able to give us information on the image of itself that the Church had produced in certain contexts and on what the bishops had done to adapt themselves and their dioceses to this image. Lajos Pásztor, one of the most acute investigators of the curial history in the contemporary age, concluded in this regard that the *relationes* inform us about

certain ecclesiastical structures within which the pastoral activity of the bishops took place. But the way in which this was implemented, also conditioned the structures, remaining, of course, in turn conditioned by them. From all this, as from the relationship between bishops and secular and religious clergy, between bishops and faithful, between bishops and political and lay authorities belonging to other religions – all explicit in the text –, is outlined a religious reality, a human reality, whose importance cannot be ignored, which indeed constitutes a very valuable contribution to any historical deepening.³⁴

³⁴ Pásztor, “Recensione”, quoted by Cavalleri, “Visite pastorali”, 106 (“Determinate strutture ecclesiastiche entro le quali si è svolta l’attività pastorale dei vescovi; ma il modo in cui questa si attuava, condizionava anche le strutture, restando, ovviamente, a sua volta condizionata da esse. Da tutto ciò, come dai rapporti tra vescovi e clero secolare e regolare, tra vescovi e fedeli, tra vescovi e autorità politiche e laici appartenenti ad altre religioni – tutti espliciti nel testo –, viene a delinearsi una realtà religiosa, una realtà umana, di cui non può essere ignorata l’importanza, che anzi costituisce un contributo validissimo ad ogni approfondimento storico”).

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